

**Filmic Madness: Metafilms as Metaphor for  
Madness in Recent Film.**

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## Abstract

This thesis concerns the possibility of "madness" working within film, both in content and form, as a critical device. The questions that will first be asked and will later be explored are all relevant to the intrinsic contradictions that the postmodern period embodies. Firstly I will define the Foucauldian idea of art and madness and then define metafilm and its possible symbiotic relationship with this madness. In my chosen films lies the possibility of madness and self-reflexivity coming together in different ways. I will explore the potential of madness and film working together to produce a subversive aesthetic that is able to metaphorically ask questions about society, one that might potentially carry on the "meta" modernist tradition of works of art that work against and outside the dominant order of bourgeois values and ideals. If madness can be seen to be working within these films, we might ask whether this force should be viewed as a source of insight or of deceit? Does it express or does it play with the deepest existential

concerns of the human spirit? If my chosen films are able to use madness's critical ability then they might be labelled as metafilms. But in saying this I will also explore the possibility that my chosen films are just postmodern pastiche, films that use popular uncritical depictions of "madness" as hollow motifs and are in no way, other than in a postmodern recycling of style, connected to Foucault's critical modernist idea of madness.



## Introduction

### ***Filmic Madness: Metafilms as Metaphor for Madness in Recent Film.***

*In a totally sane society, madness is the only freedom.*

-JG Ballard

In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Foucault argues how madness has been silenced, excluded, trapped and pathologised in the discourses of science, philosophy and literature. At the same time, he argues, that madness also has the special counter-ability of being able to work from the inside of art, and literature: its purpose to disorient and disrupt normative categories by working metaphorically from the inside, turning the existential angst of the artist back onto the world that created it.

On a historical scale, madness has been silenced and feared. In its systematic defence against reason's other, madness, society has built walls around mental institutions to separate reason from unreason and to isolate the Other in its quest to define and reaffirm

itself as sane. In doing this any form of expression that is considered a threat to the constructs of morality, normalcy and ideology is censored and silenced.

But it is not possible to silence madness totally. Madness has had an ungovernable history of counteracting that which seeks to repress it by manifesting itself through works of art in order to ask questions of and about society. In Foucault's view, the modernist artists that create these subversive works follow in the steps of Nietzsche, Artaud, et al. They have produced a series of fictions, texts, and paintings, which resist and interrupt the illusionary and controlling rationality of bourgeois values and ideals. It is through a self-reflexive counter-action where these works find their critical power.

In *Madness and Civilization*, through discussions of Goya's paintings of the tormented mad and De Sade's novels with their preoccupation with sexual deviancy, Foucault explains how art can in different ways be interrupted through "madness":

...through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world, to reveal there its non-sense, and to transfigure itself with the features of pathology alone, actually engages within itself the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.<sup>1</sup>

This important explanation of the critical ability of madness appears near the end of Foucault's archaeology. It concerns the possibility of madness interrupting certain works of art, ultimately turning these works back upon the world that gave birth to them.

Foucault saw the madness that is expressed through art as the "foil of reason -as the locus of the ultimate truth of human reality"<sup>2</sup>. He theorised that madness has been given a discursive and detrimental burden by the rationality and all encompassing power of scientific reason. Through his poetic prose, Foucault speaks of the interruptions of madness, as expressed through art and literature, as

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 273-274

<sup>2</sup> Gutting, Gary. *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) p. 263

holding a privileged truth and as the key to "the understanding of human reality that will lead us beyond the arbitrary restrictions of mere reason".<sup>3</sup> This displaces the conception of madness as an object about which truths are formulated to madness as a subject that has the unique ability to express truths of its own.<sup>4</sup>

The aim, the challenge, and the contestation which Foucault foresaw within art and literature, is when madness may escape its confinement so that we may be engaged by its immediacy and disruptive presence. However, Foucault claimed that these works are not mad themselves; the philosophy of Nietzsche and the paintings of Van Gogh reflect their madness, but the work is not itself mad and it is not the product of madness:

*Where there is a work of art, there is no madness; and yet madness is contemporary with the work of art... The moment when, together, the work of art and madness are born and fulfilled is the beginning of the time when the world*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 263

<sup>4</sup> Gutting, Gary. *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) p. 96

finds itself arraigned by that work of art and responsible before it for what it is.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, where madness interrupts the work of art, there can be no madness. Madness has now transformed, through the violence it does to the work of art, from meaningless to meaningful. If madness is able to interrupt, to shock, to stifle and disorient, to expose the angst and burden of the artist, it now holds the power to undermine its historical burden by working against that which seeks to repress it, and in the process has the potential to become the catalyst for a change of consciousness that reveals the power structures that seek to perpetuate ideals, standards and morals.

Even though Foucault concentrates on works of literature and art, like those of Borges and Goya, to provide a history of both the silencing and critical ability of this madness, I would like to explore if this special form of "madness" is relevant and important to recent film. I would like to examine if madness' critical ability is still applicable and able

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<sup>5</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p.274

to be applied to the filmic projections of the current period. The films of the current period are usually read and labelled as postmodernist so I wish to explore whether a return to critical modernist strategies can be detected and applied to recent films.

If a return to critical modernist sensibilities can be detected in recent films that utilise the Foucauldian idea of "madness", these films might be labelled as being Metafilm. Metafilm is a critical modernist category that follows in the tradition of films like Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blowup* (1966) and Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963). Both these metafilms position centre stage the angst and the existential and philosophical concerns of the filmmaker through the troublesome relationship the film's protagonist[s] has with what is real and what is imagined. This strategy is akin to the real and imagined in madness. Metafilm, being an opposing force to illusory mainstream cinema holds the possibility, through its self-reflexive tendencies and frame breaks, of opening out into the world to express the deepest concerns of the filmmaker who tries to convey, through using madness in the content and form of the film's

narrative, their existential angst and ontological concerns.

Through the potential use of this special form of madness, metafilm has the ability to make unstable and denaturalise the lies and self-deceptions of bourgeois values and ideals. It has the critical ability of being able to work within its own sense making system to reveal what has been excluded, decreed abnormal, senseless or unacceptable, and by creating a relationship between sense and nonsense, reason and unreason. This is where metafilm might be seen as having a symbiotic relationship with madness.

This kind of madness might potentially manifest itself through the content and form of the film, by the constant reference to the theme of madness, delirium and pathology inside the narrative of the film, and, also through the disruption of the orthodox narrative which often mirrors the film's protagonist's unstable grasp on reality. Often this works through the film's protagonist's narcissism, schizophrenia, paranoia, pathologies and existential angst. This character may have difficulty in distinguishing between reality and fantasy and this is often mirrored in the form of the narrative that forces the spectator

into a tumultuous position where the film itself, like its protagonist, becomes schizophrenic and therefore difficult to read, disrupting systems of normalcy.

This form of cinematic interruption may hold the power of being able to turn the film's self-reflexive concerns back upon the spectator to ask questions about society. If my chosen films are able to do this then they might be labelled as metafilms. But in saying this I will also explore the possibility that my chosen films are just postmodern pastiche, films that use popular uncritical depictions of "madness" as hollow motifs and are no way connected to Foucault's critical modernist idea of madness.

In my three films I would like to explore the possibility of Foucault's idea of madness. For example, in the first scene in Spike Jonze's *Adaptation*(2002), Charlie Kaufman is heard over the top of the film's credits, "Do I have an original thought in my head? My bald head? Maybe if I were happier, my hair wouldn't be falling out. I'm a walking cliché. I really need to go to the doctor to have my leg checked. There's something wrong. A bump. If I stopped putting things off I would be happier. All I do is sit on my fat ass. If my ass wasn't so



fat, I would be happier. I need to turn my life around. I need to fall in love. Just be real. Confident. All my problems and anxiety can be reduced to a chemical imbalance...or some kind of misfiring synapses. I need to get help for that".

Charlie's neurotic droning is suddenly interrupted by John Malkovich yelling "shut up". He is shown in a flashback to the set of *Being John Malkovich* (1999), playing himself and directing a scene in which there appears to be a multitude of replications of himself. In the background skulks the protagonist of the film, Charlie Kaufman, the star of the film, the scriptwriter of the film and the writer struggling to write the film within the film we are watching. Kaufman is played by Nicolas Cage, who also plays Charlie's twin brother Donald, even though neither Nicolas Cage or the real Charlie Kaufman have a twin brother.

John Malkovich is playing himself and appears to be directing a scene in the film in which he is staring and did not direct, from within *Adaptation*. This scene was never in the original *Being John Malkovich* and appears to be set outside the diegetic space of the original film, like it might be a

fantasy, born straight from Charlie's imaginings. There also appear to be fictional characters that are specifically named with on-screen titles, namely Lance Acord, cinematographer and Thomas Smith, first assistant director, who never were involved in the making of *Being John Malkovich* but are being used in such a way to suggest they were.

Spike Jonze, the real director of *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation*, seems strangely absent from this scene. Nicolas Cage, who is playing Charlie Kaufman, the real scriptwriter of *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation*, is seen wandering round on the set of the film for which the character he is playing, the "real" Charlie Kaufman, wrote the script. The conventions of documentary realism are also being used in this first scene. Both the handheld camera and the grainy video resolution add a kind of irony to this opening scene. It seems almost as if constructs of realism are being paraded before us by exposing and falsifying the way they create "truth", making their use as actuality creating devices absurd, thus, merging and making problematic the distinction between fantasy and reality. This leads to the film possibly

creating a problematic distinction between fantasy and reality, a category of madness.

The appearance of the scriptwriter, Charlie Kaufman, who is being played by someone who is manifestly not Charlie Kaufman, the non-appearance of the real director on the set of the film within the film who has been taken over by that film's lead actor, John Malkovich, the replication of the real John Malkovich, who is playing himself and directing a scene within the movie that is not the movie we are meant to be watching, and all the other self-reflexive problems that unfold in this first scene give the film a very unstable and erratic feeling. Right here, at the very start of the film, it seems that the orthodox sensibility of film is being replaced by the confusion of extra-filmic realities and filmic illusion. This strategy might be potentially seen as being akin to the real and the imagined in madness, in the critical modernist sense, or then again this strategy might be far simpler: an entertaining game. If the film's strategy is one in which madness is used in its critical modernist form, *Adaptation* could be read as a metafilm.

What we are watching in the first few minutes of *Adaptation* is confusing and perhaps purposely so. Charlie's neurotic rambling in the first scene may be signalling that the film is using madness as a critical device, turning back Charlie's neuroses onto the spectator, or then again it may be just playing with the motif of the mad artist or the nerdy writer, using it as pastiche for no particular reason other than hip entertainment.

Nothing is really known at this point, but it can be assumed that the film is suggesting that Charlie is having problems differentiating between fantasy and reality and is therefore using a form of madness. The spectator is disoriented by a strategy that seems to be mirroring Charlie's neurotic mind. This points to some problems in reading the film at this early stage. As mentioned, this could signal a postmodern game in which the film winks knowingly to the spectator, or, on the opposite end of the scale might be pointing to Charlie's spiral into the depths of madness, and in doing so might signal that the film has a greater purpose and critical intent.

From this point on, the narrative of the film seems to carry on mirroring Charlie's neurotic angst

in both content and form. It seems that the filmic Charlie might be mirroring the "real" Charlie Kaufman's struggle in writing the film itself, the multiple replications of John Malkovich again might to be showing how the real Charlie Kaufman himself feels about his mental predicament as a struggling artist feeling the pressure to write a complex script. These neuroses effectively come to a head when Charlie metaphorically splits himself in two, in the schizophrenic split when he meets his twin brother Donald.

The first scene in the film is obviously self-reflexive like many other films that might be seen as being postmodern; it is a scene about filmmaking, perhaps using a technique similar to Brechtian alienation, or again it might be just be playing with the medium of film itself, using political techniques like alienation and the motif of the mad artist in a postmodern form of non-critical recycling. If this first scene is at all meaningful it might present a challenge through a strategy of confusion, caused by "madness", to the illusory representational powers of cinema and consequently the social construction of everyday life.

The possibility of madness working as a critical device is also evident at the start of *Lynch's Mulholland Dr.* The film starts with a group of dancers performing the jitterbug against a vibrant purple screen, the dancers' costumes suggesting something out of the 1950s. The scene is intercut with flashes of a young blonde girl, later to be identified as Diane Selwyn, standing between an elderly couple who are smiling inanely. On first glance the dancers' shadows are projected onto the purple screen, but if studied closer the shadows do not appear to match the dancers. By all accounts this first scene looks unreal; the dancer's reflections are hollow figures with a hyper-composed flatness. The reflections on the purple backdrop seem to be one dimensional, making the filmic projections look like cardboard cut outs. The purple screen also gives the impression that we are actually watching a movie within a movie. You can make out familiar objects but cannot place these objects in any recognisable context.

The scene then fades into a POV shot from someone or something breathing heavily, and then collapsing face-first onto a pillow on a bed. As the scene changes, the music that set the dance scene is

suddenly interrupted by the visceral sound of strained breathing and out of focus camera work. There is a dream-like quality about this first few minutes, at first nostalgic and then terrifying as the atmosphere changes. It is as if these first few minutes of the film are drifting from someone's dream fantasy to someone's reality and that these two opposing poles might signal that the film wishes to highlight the consequences and possible causes of such a bipolar or schizophrenic condition. The intent being that the film's protagonist might be experiencing a schizophrenic break in which their perception of reality has become one with recurring multiple delusions.

Again, just like in the first few minutes of *Adaptation* the logical flow of the orthodox narrative is being disturbed by a series of alternations between what might be seen as the reality and fantasy of its mentally troubled protagonist, Diane Selwyn. This may be signalling that the film is a metafilm and intends to use its protagonist's pathologies, her *madness*, as a critical device both through the content and form of the film. This might be a strategy that mirrors the filmmaker's concerns and burden.

The same sort of ambivalence pervades the opening scenes of *The Matrix*. The very first scene may be a possible clue to its critical intension. What we first see is the recognisable logo of the Warner Bros., but on closer inspection something is wrong with the logo. Its usual blue-sky background has been replaced with grey desolate clouds and the logo itself has been changed to the recognisable green of the Matrix. This is an overt manipulation of a prominent symbol of capitalism. This is the establishing shot of sorts, or at least a subversion of the Hollywood establishing shot because it perhaps signals that the narrative wishes to play with the nature of reality and fantasy, suggesting, further the possibility that the form of the narrative may reflect the concerns of the filmmaker with what is real and what is imagined, both personally and in society. These concerns might also be recognised later as we learn that the film's protagonist "Neo" struggles with the knowledge that the world as he knows it is a fantasy or personal delusion.

For the film's protagonist Neo, the first part of the film is the ultimate paranoid nightmare, drawn from the fear and suspicion that reality is not what



he thinks it is, and that there is a malevolent conspiracy to keep everyone under control. Later on in the film Neo might be seen as being plunged into an even more powerful fantasy: the narcissistic dream that "he is special, and is the messiah, and the rules do not apply to him, even if they do for everyone else." Of course it is entirely possible that Neo is imagining all that happens in the film and that he has suffered a schizophrenic break with reality. It is of course possible that Neo is pathologically "mad" and that what he sees and hears are only projections of his deluded and troubled mind. Again, if *The Matrix* is actually using "madness" as a subversive critical device that works through its content and form, the film might be utilising a critical modernist metafilmic strategy, and therefore could be labelled as a metafilm. If this is so, then it might be possible to apply Foucault's theory of madness to the film, as the filmmakers' may have succeeded in engaging the spectator on an existentially critical level by using the critical form of "madness", both through the content and form of the narrative, to ask question about society.

There are, of course, problems in reading my three films with any certainty. Are the films gearing up to use madness in the critical Foucauldian sense, or are they just using the motif of madness as entertainment, as a cliché for the fashionable cineaste, with no regard for its critical implications? Here lies the paradox that these three films embody from their beginnings: are the films making themselves problematic for a reason, or are they just playing uncritical postmodern games? Are the films really asking us to examine what is real and meaningful in postmodern society by utilising madness' disruptive presence? Or alternatively, are these films just reflecting the social conditions that gave birth to them? This is the question that this thesis examines. A postmodern perspective might argue that these questions have no answer and these films set themselves up to enigmatise themselves, but a critical modernist perspective might argue that these films do seek to ask specific questions of and about society through making problematic, both through their content and form, reality and fantasy. If this is detectible the Foucauldian idea of madness may have found its critical ability.

The impetus of the critical "metafilmic" modernist filmmaker, whether he was Expressionist or Surrealist, was a critical one; he wanted to bring about change through his artistic medium. In the case of the Surrealists, they were revolting against a society that seemed corrupt to its core, especially after the dehumanisation of civilisation after the insanity of the mechanised warfare in WWI. They wanted to change the way that we saw reality, transforming it into a higher sur-reality. This was often achieved through "madness". What the Surrealists aspired to was an aestheticised politics that had been squeezed out of French culture by the rationalisation and bureaucratisation of modern forms of power structures. Foucault does not specifically mention that his theory of madness fits into a modernist political category like Surrealism, rather, my reading is that he treats it as an outlet of philosophical and existential enquiry, where the "mad" and often incarcerated artist, who has been silenced and deemed insane by bourgeois society, is left with only one possible outlet for his cries of angst and retaliation: his art.

On the other side of the scale, one of postmodernism's characteristics, like that of the political Modernist's, is its lack of interest in unity and order. However, unlike the critical modernist sensibility, postmodernism is concerned more with the lack of being able to define reality or truth with any certainty and in this regard is a direct confrontation with Foucault's theorisation of madness as an existentially critical truth finding device. In this regard the postmodern period might be thought of as post-political or post-critical. In other words I could argue that my chosen films can also be read as being "beyond" meaning and thus a site where conflicting and contradictory meanings flourish, simply for the pleasure of doing so. This may mean that if something similar to "madness" is detectible in my three films it may only be being used in a postmodern form of uncritical recycling: A simulation of a previous critical form.

Baudrillard seems most relevant to this understanding. He sees post-industrial society as "the society of the spectacle that thrives on the ecstasy

of communication".<sup>6</sup> This society, he believes, is dominated by electronic mass media and is characterised by simulation. Baudrillard argues that post-industrial society is characterised by reproduction and recycling of images. This society can no longer produce the "real" but only the "hyper-real". "By this he means that the real is no longer the real, it is not what can be reproduced but, rather, that which is always already produced which is essentially a simulation".<sup>7</sup>

Baudrillard's ideas can be used, in the context of this thesis, to question the notion that Foucault's idea of madness may still find its critical ability through film. In other words, on one side of the ring we have Foucault's madness, a critical modernist device that might potentially be used to find meaning through cinema, on the other Baudrillard's postmodern idea that we are beyond meaning and any form of critical activity can be seen as a simulation of previous forms and is therefore uncritical and apolitical.

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<sup>6</sup> Denzin, Norman. *Images of Postmodern Society*, (London: Sage, 1991), p. 79.

<sup>7</sup> Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies: The Key concepts*, (Routledge, New York, 2000), p. 281

Foucault's rhetoric fascinates me. The very notion of madness *interrupting* a work of art may sound implausible but if we look at this possibility in regard to my three chosen films a return to this modernist avenue of enquiry may be detectible. The term "madness" is neither a strict medical term like pathology, neurosis, or insanity, nor is its dictionary definition always clear or precise. I believe this is why Foucault used the word in the first place. For this thesis, then, I use the term "madness" as a possible avenue of existential enquiry that is produced in and by certain "metafilms".

My concern here will be less to find an answer or to make a statement than to undertake an analysis, an exploration of how film holds the possibility of utilising the disruptive tendencies of madness to counteract that which seeks to silently and systematically endow us with certain ideals and beliefs.

Foucault believed that the interruptions of madness in art has the special ability to make unstable and denaturalise the narratives and self-deceptions of bourgeois values and ideals by turning the existential angst of its artists back upon society

to make society accountable for what it is. It has the critical ability of being able to disrupt artistic expression by including what has been excluded, decreed abnormal, senseless or unacceptable. This is where recent film might be seen as being able to have a symbiotic relationship with madness: using its frame-breaks and existential enquiry to defeat the hegemonic logic of reason by turning its images of delirium and schizophrenia back upon the spectator.

## **Chapter I**

### ***Adaptation***

*I am not a drug addict, and I really have no wish to murder a screenwriter*

-Susan Orlean.

The replication of John Malkovich near the beginning of *Adaptation* might be seen to stem from Charlie Kaufman's troubled mind, giving birth to a disjointed narrative that flows like and reflects the psyche of its protagonist. It is of interest to me to examine why the film sets out to use a strategy in which spectators are prevented from settling into a linear narrative and are, rather, taken on a haphazard ride that creates the illusion of a problematic fantasy and reality dichotomy that might be seen as being akin to the real and imagined in madness. As mentioned in the introduction I would like to explore the contradictions that arise in trying to apply Foucault's theory of madness to *Adaptation*. If Foucault's madness is detectible, then *Adaptation* might be a metafilm that follows in the critical



modernist tradition. Trying to apply Foucault's madness to the film may also highlight the contradictions that arise in a postmodern period that is haunted by critical modernist tendencies. These questions can be explored through a close reading of the film.

As argued in the introduction, Foucault's theory suggests that some artistic expression, through its interruptions of madness "offer[s] our main hope of breaking out of the lies and self-deceptions of bourgeois values".<sup>1</sup> Foucault's theory of madness suggests this through examining subversive art, such as Goya's paintings and De Sade's Novels. The question in the context of the thesis is if this madness is still relevant and detectable through recent films or whether or not its critical power has been made obsolete by a postmodern period that is characterised by apoliticality, and a simulacrum of styles and images.

*Adaptation* is a movie about a scriptwriter, Charlie Kaufman, who has to adapt Susan Orlean's *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Gutting, Gary. *Michel Foucault's archaeology of scientific reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) p. 98

*Orchid Thief* into a movie. Charlie has a passion for Orlean's writing; it is so simple and pure, but perplexed by the book's lack of structure, he slips into what seems like a form of psychosis. A nervous, sweating, bundle of nerves, Charlie is so insecure that he is by far the most maladapted and paranoid character in the movie.

The film's story sets itself up in the tradition of German Romanticism, using the motif of the flower and the artist's quest for beauty, truth: the illusive symbols of romantic yearning that romantic poets have always sought. Novalis, a German Romantic poet comes to mind. Novalis (1772-1801) was the pseudonym of Friedrich Leopold, Baron Von Hardenberg. He was a German poet who influenced later Romantic thought. The central image of Novalis' visions, a blue flower, became a symbol of longing among Romantics. The "blue flower" is unattainable and is that which the romantic poet seeks. *Adaptation* follows in this tradition in the form of the illusive and pure orchid that Charlie seeks to write his screenplay about.

As the movie progresses Charlie becomes more and more depressed and manic because of the impossibility of adapting Orlean's book into a screenplay. His quest

for purity, beauty and truth becomes more and more problematic, driving Charlie deeper and deeper into mental solitude and despair as he discovers the impossibility of producing his pure screen adaptation. In fact the film ends by contradicting itself, as the screenplay cannot be written at all. As Charlie becomes more and more depressed with the impossibility of the task, he appears to become more and more unhinged and starts, it seems, to create the adaptation in his head. Orlean's book becomes a fantasy within Charlie Kaufman's mind and takes characters, facts, and Orlean herself and turns them from non-fiction into fiction. In the process of doing this film becomes more and more unstable as we realise that what we are seeing is problematic because it mirrors Charlie's difficulty in recognising fantasy from reality. What we hear and what we see becomes unstable, as we are not sure whether or not it is Charlie's fantasy or his reality.

The movie ends with the author of the book chasing and trying to kill the author of the screenplay. But to make the film even more entropic, Susan Orlean and Charlie Kaufman are real people whose histories have been overtly fictionalised for the

film. Orlean did write the book *The Orchid Thief*, itself an expansion of an article she wrote for *The New Yorker*, but the "real" Orlean, we can be fairly certain, did not try to kill Charlie Kaufman, whilst frantically pursuing him and his identical twin through the swamps of central Florida. Neither, as far as I know, did she have a sordid affair with the toothless, John Laroche, the orchid-crazed, redneck, sociopath. Perhaps the Seminole Indians do know how to extract the mind altering, hallucinogenic drug from the rare orchid, or perhaps they do not. Nothing is certain in *Adaptation*. All this seems to suggest that what is unfolding throughout the film is part reality and part fantasy born from the unquiet mind of the film's protagonist, Charlie. This also suggests that the film may be playing with what is real and what is imaginary: a category of madness.

An early scene shows Charlie and a studio executive discussing how he might adapt Susan Orlean's novel, *The Orchid Thief*, for the screen. From what I can gather this scene is set in Charlie's reality, within the film, and is not one of his fantasies. It seems that the narrative jumps back and forth from Charlie's reality to his fantasies and it is often

difficult to work out which is which due to the merging of the real and the imaginary. The film plays tricks on us in this way and, like Charlie's mental state, makes the distinction between reality and fantasy problematic.

In a scene near the beginning of the film Charlie is talking to the studio executive about a real book *The Orchard Thief* on which he is attempting to write the screenplay for from within the constructed filmic world of *Adaptation*, which is also the very film we are watching. The fact that Charlie Kaufman is the main character in the film yet is also the producer, and screenwriter of the film, makes my head ache and is a technique the film uses to enigmatise itself. In this way, thematically the story takes second place and the craziness of the film takes centre stage. Everything from the very start of the film overshadows the simple and romantic story of Charlie adapting the book into a screenplay.

Charlie tells the studio executive that he does not intend to turn the film into "a Hollywood thing...making it an Orchid heist thing...changing the orchids into poppies and making it about drug running. I don't want to cram in sex or guns or car chases or

have characters learning profound life lessons or growing up coming to like each other or overcoming obstacles to succeed in the end." This scene virtually lays out how the film concludes. A little over an hour from now Charlie will do everything that he just said he did not want to do, further making everything that Charlie states at the start of the film, unreliable. This may also point at Charlie's unstable grasp on reality.

As the film continues its illogic becomes more pronounced as it further mirrors Charlie's increasingly erratic mental state, creating in his mind, how he would or should be able to adapt Orlean's book. At this stage the film is becoming more and more difficult to read. The next scene plunges us back three years earlier to the *New Yorker* magazine where the real Susan Orlean actually worked. This scene shows Meryl Streep playing the part of Susan Orlean, starting to write the article that leads to the book on which the movie within the movie is being adapted to. Through Streep's voiceover we learn of the book's protagonist, John Larouche, the orchid thief himself and how, with the help of three seminal Indians, he uses a loophole in the law to steal rare and prized

orchids. This scene appears to come straight from the page Orlean is typing, signalling a well-used genre scene transition, but making its use seem dubious because of the irregularities of the film thus far.

*Adaptation* seems to follow the haphazard trajectory of Charlie's mind to bewilder its audience. Quite often, voice-over is heard in the form of either Charlie's rumination, or other voices that appear to stem directly from inside Charlie's head. This has the effect of suggesting that Charlie, himself, is taking on and fantasising the personas of some of the characters in the film. These might be read as being multiple personalities or "voices" in Charlie's head. Apart from suggesting Charlie's multiple personalities this strategy is also a subversion of the voice-over technique that further adds to the unreliability of the film's many narrators. In an orthodox narrative, voice-over is used to, as Kozloff argues, "naturalize cinematic narration", and in doing so "also creates a special relationship with the viewer"<sup>2</sup>. The voiceover, as a technique to produce authority and realism, is

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<sup>2</sup> Kozloff, Sarah. *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over narration in American Fiction Film*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 129.

subverted throughout the film, as all these voices might be seen as originating in the troubled mind of Charlie Kaufman rather than being a legitimising voice of reason and authority.

Generally, voiceover is used to add authority and realism to a film or documentary, to backup and make credible its statement. *Adaptation* seems to use voiceover for the opposite effect, to make absurd its use as an actuality-creating device by hinting that these voices originate in the head of Charlie Kaufman. Near the end of the movie, screenwriting guru Robert McKee (Brian Cox) chastises a group of would-be screenwriters, "And god help you if you ever use voiceover," by which time *Adaptation* has become a plethora of voiceovers. These include Susan Orlean's bevy of thoughts and stream of consciousness passages from her book, John Laroche's episodic, essayistic, and depressing own life, and of course Charlie's endless droning, self-absorbed, narcissistic and introverted monologues. Even the voice of Charles Darwin is heard ruminating on his *The Decent of Man*. This endless flood of voices, ideas, writings, ruminations and musings make the film quintessentially



disquieting and hard to follow, again suggesting that they are voices in Charlie's head.

My argument that Charlie is possibly experiencing a form of multiple personality disorder is further reinforced in the scene where he meets his "twin". Charlie Kaufman appears, walking up the stairs of his apartment. At the top of the stairs, another Charlie appears. It is Charlie's twin brother Donald, lying on the floor. Donald tells Charlie that he is going to be a screenwriter. On a meta-level, this meeting of the two identical men (two Nicolas Cages) presents a major disjuncture in the film. This is perhaps the most important scene in the whole film, not because of the magic of its special effects, but because this scene may signal that Charlie is in fact suffering from schizophrenia and that his "twin" is a mental projection of his troubled mind. I say this because up until now "madness" in this film has only been hinted at and played with in Charlie's neuroses and self-doubt. Later we learn that Donald may also be Charlie's idealised other, as Donald is far more confident and attractive to the opposite sex than Charlie can ever be.

The film might be seen as suggesting that Charlie has schizophrenia from the very beginning. Within the film's problematic relationship with fantasy and reality we get the sense that Charlie is constructing the film out of his imagination, with its multiple voices and fragmented and disorienting scenes. At the start of the film we see Charlie on the set of *Being John Malkovich*, surrounded by replications of the real John Malkovich. This is crazy due to it being a certainty that John Malkovich does not have a twin, let alone this many twins. But the question that is being hinted at here might be that Charlie is having trouble distinguishing between fantasy and reality and that the replications of John Malkovich are purely a projection of the protagonist's unquiet mind.

This is where the possibility lies of Foucault's theory of "madness" working from within the narrative to bring to light questions about society and the individual. We might, at this stage, ask whether the film's strategy of making problematic the distinction between fantasy and reality should be viewed as one of insight or of playfulness. Does it express the actual angst of the filmmaker or is he simply inventing a

fashionable game in which spectators play a knowing part.

The film continues to mirror Charlie's failing grasp on reality. One moment we are back at Charlie's apartment watching him struggle with writing a seemingly impossible screenplay of the film within the film, and the next we are sharply transported back to Orlean writing *The Orchid Thief*, which seems to suggest that the film is following Charlie's non-linear stream of consciousness. This makes for a delirious state of ongoing confusion in which we have to work hard in order to comprehend the film itself. This, for me, makes trying to decipher the story rather like some sort of game, that is, it is a game watching this film because the pieces are out of order, resistant to making sense in the way that we are used to.

Directly after Charlie is seen struggling with his screenplay adaptation, we are once again transported back to Susan Orlean writing the *Orchid Thief*. Her musings are again heard in voiceover as she documents a history of orchid hunting stating that it was a "mortal occupation". Her musings are then transported to a flashback sequence of events that

happened 100 years earlier. Here we see a re-enactment of the orchid hunter William Arnold and others as they meet untimely deaths in their struggle to find rare and prized orchids.

Again this flashback sequence might be being used to deliberately play with the "given" nature or "validity" of its images that again suggest that these images are purely the fragmented and fractured thoughts from Charlie's mind. What we see in this scene is a historical re-enactment that, in accordance with the whole film, seems to be a little out of place, suggesting that this scene is deliberately dramatising and playing with Orlean's story. This scene, like the opening scene is done with documentary realism to give it an air of realism and authority. It is an exciting scene that adds grandiosity to the mortal occupation of orchid hunting, but in a film like this, whose depictions are unstable, casts a shadow of doubt over itself.

The scene then shifts again to the modern day orchid hunter John Laroche. Once again he seems to come directly from the pages that Orlean is writing, reusing a well-known scene transition. Streep's voiceover is again paramount for this effect.

The next scene is disrupted again by the appearance of Charlie at work on the adaptation of the film that we are already watching. In the previous scene we saw Orlean writing her article for *The New Yorker*; she has not yet finished this article and accordingly has not started on her book *The Orchid Thief* that spawned from the original article. This makes the next scene very disorienting as we see Charlie's frustration as he works on the film adaptation of the *Orchid Thief*. This again causes a form of filmic delirium because in the previous scene the book has not even been started.

As the film moves on the disruption of narrative time and space becomes more and more pronounced. Charlie's possible multiple personalities continue to mirror the narrative itself. Orlean writing her article/book and at the same time Charlie writing the screenplay of Orlean's book, clearly make unreal the two narrative spaces but also seem to be defining themselves by their illogic. These two narratives, Orlean's and Kaufman's, are divided by several years, yet the film positions them beside each other making their existence within the world of the film, problematic. This sort of technique where dual

narratives separated by years exist in a single space are often used in films, but in this film is especially pronounced due it possibly being drawn from the unrealities of Charlie's mind.

The content of the whole film is mirrored in Donald's writing of his screenplay *The 3*. This is a parallel story in which Charlie's twin brother Donald is writing the film script with the intention of selling it. *The 3* is everything that Charlie despises: a conventional Hollywood screenplay that draws from clichéd popular forms. Donald making a film that makes no sense where the same character imagines and plays all the parts mirrors *Adaptation* itself.

In a scene where Charlie is indulging in a narcissistic sexual fantasy about a girl from a local café, Donald barges in to Charlie's room raving about his ideas for the script. It is hard at this point to tell whether Charlie is awake or still dreaming. Donald gives Charlie his "pitch". Charlie, whose frustration is increasing, endeavours to explain why the logic of Donald's script is absurd, but fails due to his inability to explain the logic of the narrative structure. Donald's script, it seems, just like the film we are watching, is impossible to explain.

In Donald's screenplay, the lead character, a schizophrenic cross-dressing psychopathic cop, plays the part of three characters in a generic "good cop bad cop" scenario. Charlie points out that the script is unproducable due to the impossibility of having the same character (who plays three parts) held prisoner in a basement and working in a police station at the same time. "In the *reality* of this movie" states Charlie "when there is only one character, how could you...what exactly..." (he trails off and is forced to stop). Charlie gives up and calls the idea *Sybil* meets *Dressed to Kill*, both of which feature multiple personality disorder.

Here Charlie attempts to explain to Donald why his film could not possibly work but has to give up due to the logic of the plot being impossible to explain. It is also of interest how the lead character of Donald's film also suffers from multiple personality disorder. In Foucault's view, mad artists who suffer from mental disorders such as Schizophrenia, enable through their art a form of existential plea in which their madness' only possible outlet is through the work of art. Foucault sees the artistic output of the deemed "mad" and often-

incarcerated artist to be their last cry of hope to the world that has seen fit to silence them.

The film holds mirrors aloft in using Donald's screenplay not only as a reflection of how *Adaptation* itself is turning out but also hinting at Charlie's possible mental imbalances. Like the impossibility of Donald's script, with its clichéd use of genre, this scene also reflects the impossibility of *Adaptation* itself or rather it acts as a metaphor for the whole film. This labyrinthian process of duplicity where Charlie is writing a script for the film that he is in and his twin brother who might not exist in the world of the film at all is also writing a script destroys our ability to make sense and understand the logic of the film, which again may be mirroring Charlie's unstable and haphazard grasp of reality.

Later on, Charlie is again on the set of *Being John Malkovich* struggling to think of ideas for the film we are already watching. Charlie is surrounded by false walls and staging and behind his head stuck to the wall is a plan of the set's layout. All the technical tools of film and theatre that are usually hidden behind the scenes are in the frame: cameras, monitors, lights, and a dolly. He is being ignored by



all the cast. For the first time we see Donald crossing over into Charlie's reality, projecting onto Donald what Charlie really wants in life but cannot achieve because of his chronic social phobias and anxiety. This reveals that what Charlie desires can only be projected as a fantasy.

Donald is seen in this scene talking to his girlfriend who is the makeup artist for the reconstruction of *Being John Malkovich*. Donald is doing exactly what Charlie never could, charming and seducing a girl. It seems that Charlie can only accomplish this form of intimacy by creating and projecting, through his possible schizophrenia, an "Other" that is the bipolar opposite of himself. Some of the original cast of *Being John Malkovich* also appear to be hurrying between scene changes. This whole scene, like the opening scene, is again overtly constructed to be self-referential in a way that is reminiscent of many modernist films, which used Brechtian alienation tendencies.

The next scene brings Donald and his girlfriend into Charlie's home. The projection of what he wants and what he most fears is now in his home. They all discuss Donald's script, which is, of course, the film

we are watching. "You know what I did was", states Donald, "I tried to spilt the Cassie scene in half - because I wanted there to be more tension. And then you pick it up later. It keeps more tension. That way the audience gets hooked later on..." It seems that Donald's Cassie from *The 3* might be a representation of Susan Orlean in Charlie's head. This, I presume is all being created in Charlie's head while he sits in the solitude of his room.

When Charlie goes to his agent to tell him that adapting a screenplay for Orlean's book is impossible due to it being "that sprawling New Yorker shit", his agent says "alright, make one up, I mean, nobody in this town can make up a crazy story like you, you're the king of that..." With this comment his agent is not only referring directly to the character who is playing Kaufman but also to the real Charlie Kaufman, who is, of course, famous for his quirky and self-conscious screenplays. This scene appears to happen in Charlie's real world in the film and not his fantasy world. His agent tells him that he has to finish the screenplay and that to abandon it at this stage would be a terrible career move. Charlie's neurosis seems to

be worsening. He is steadily succumbing to his mental illness.

Desperate, Charlie goes back home and once again appears to return to the world in his head. Donald again appears. He has just come home from a scriptwriting seminar touting the screenwriting prowess of Robert McKee: "He's serious, too Charles, you'd love him. He's all for originality, just like you". Donald also talks again about his film and how he is going to use the "motif of broken mirrors to show my protagonist's fragmented self". Another clue that Donald is only a figment of Charlie's mind. Donald also tells Charlie that he is going to use "Happy Together" in his film. The song starts off "imagine me and you..." another reference to Charlie's twin personalities.

Charlie seems to push Donald out of his head so that he can go to sleep. Charlie awakes and reads a passage from Orlean's book. His fantasy again takes over and Orlean seems to be talking to Charlie. His fantasy continues and he and Orlean have sex. The next morning Charlie is extremely happy. Donald and his girlfriend are there, but Charlie's attitude to his split personality self has drastically changed.

Suddenly, instead of being Charlie's tormenter, Donald has become his reassuring voice. His moods often swing from a form of mania to depression, which again suggest his possible bipolar disorder.

Charlie goes to pick up his lunch and bumps into the young agent that he first met to talk about the script. Susan Orlean is there, in real life. This panics Charlie, as so far he has only been able to interact with Orlean as a fantasy. The real-life Orlean is something else. Facing what is real is impossible for Charlie as he lives and interacts mostly in a fantasy world in his head. He flees. He sits in his car sweating and rambling about his own inner conflict. In his mind he thinks, "The only thing I'm qualified to write about is myself and my own self..." He gets excited and starts writing the movie we have already been watching, starting again with the scene with the young studio executive. But then his inner torment comes back to haunt him. Donald once again appears.

In Charlie's head, his alter-ego Donald, keeps on touting the lessons of Robert McKee, a real-life screenwriting guru, while Charlie in his reality becomes increasingly exhausted in trying to find new

ways of telling Orlean's story. Near the end of the film the action appears to happen completely in Charlie's head suggesting his total descent into mental illness. The film seamlessly transforms into the type of generic illusionary fare that Charlie has been so anxious to avoid. Orlean has now become a drug addict, and has fallen in love with her literary subject, Charlie and Donald set out to play detective and get taken hostage, guns appear from nowhere, and Laroche gets eaten by a crocodile in a chase through a swamp. The tables have turned; seamlessly, *Adaptation* has changed from a Charlie script to a Donald script. Charlie's fantasy has totally consumed him and his illness has reached its peak.

He betrays everything he swore he would not do at the beginning of the film: "I don't want to ruin it by making it a Hollywood thing...I don't want to cram in sex or guns or car crashes or characters learning profound life lessons" in order to accomplish his job. It is almost as if the film has malfunctioned and reverted to parody, but not quite: this inversion acts as a frame break, the creation of an illusion provides the essential deconstruction method that reveals the

whole film, especially the crazy second half, as a falsity.

The film ends with Charlie in monologue, mirroring the start of the film. Yet, he is now manically happy, his illness has totally consumed him. One last time "Happy Together" plays, and on Wilshire Boulevard, flowers come to life to dance and sing along. In the credits, one last clue points to Charlie's sickness: "We are all one thing, Lieutenant. That's what I've come to realize. Like cells in a body. 'Cept we can't see the body. The way fish can't see the ocean. And so we envy each other. Hurt each other. Hate each other. How silly is that? A heart cell hating a lung cell."

## **Chapter II**

### ***Mulholland Dr.***

*The experience and behaviour that gets labelled schizophrenic is a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation.*

-R. D. Laing

Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.*'s non-linear, fragmented narrative may be seen as being driven by its protagonist's failing grasp on reality and decent into madness. In doing this the narrative propels us through a mysterious labyrinth of affective experiences until we arrive at the intersection where dreams and nightmares meet. In the world of *Mulholland Dr.* nothing is what it seems and everything has another darker side. It is a complex world of suspense, set in the unreal world of Los Angeles. As discussed in the introduction, the movie opens with a surreal jitterbug sequence in which we see a glowing young blonde, presumably the film's protagonist Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts), flanked by a smiling old couple. She is a model teen, and obviously adored. After a

slow pan across what will later be revealed as Diane's deathbed, the movie begins.

A mysterious woman (Laura Harring) rides in her limo down Mulholland Drive, only to be stopped and, at gunpoint, asked to exit the vehicle. This is thwarted when a speeding car slams into the limo, killing the two assassins and leaving the woman with amnesia. She wanders down into Los Angeles and hides out in an apartment. At the same time, Betty (Naomi Watts) is arriving in Hollywood, filled with the hope of being a star. On arrival at her aunt's apartment she discovers the amnesiac woman, who is now calling herself Rita. Inside Rita's purse is a huge wad of money, and a blue key. This sparks a mystery investigation. This mystery will lead them to a dead body, a movie audition, and a psychic who claims, "something is wrong".

David Lynch uses an aesthetic that stems from the insight he learned from studying modernist painting in his early years. In this regard his films can be seen as moving canvases: still images that take form and have the potential, it seems, to escape the confines of the frame, disrupting traditional narrative systems with the coherence of dream logic. In all of Lynch's films, his dream-like scenes act as doubles that are



quickly exorcised of their glamour and fantasy to unearth something far more subterranean: the other side of the dream. All Lynch's characters exhibit dangerous pathologies that are used to highlight his concerns with what is real and what is imagined in society. These existential concerns are echoed throughout *Mulholland Dr.* In this regard it might be possible to apply Foucault's theory of madness to the film, as Lynch may be trying to engage the spectator on an existentially critical level by using a critical form of "madness", both through the content and form of the film.

Lynch's latest film is an intricate puzzle, one that presents fantasy and reality as equal and indistinguishable partners but then reveals that this bipolar disposition can only end in chaos and decay. Through making problematic the distinction between the real and the imagined there lies the possibility that the film might potentially engage us through the critical use of madness. The film's narrative follows a non-linear trajectory that might be seen as mirroring the multiple personalities of the film's protagonist, Betty/Dianne towards her descent into suicide. This makes the narrative so difficult to read

that the audience is sucked into Diane's unstable mental position, where she can no longer distinguish between reality and fantasy, a schizophrenic, paranoid position.

All of what happens in the film seems to be have been created in Diane Selwyn's troubled mind. Her narcissistic fantasy world is her escape into wish fulfilment, in which all her desires are realized and then stripped of their illusions. It seems that the narrative does not take place at any single instant in Diane's life, as would a simple dream or fantasy, rather it is a conglomeration of desires and projections, a parallel interior world that is continually fuelled by Diane's possible schizophrenia. Lynch's fragmented narrative is akin to a form of delirium as it follows the unstable and imbalanced path of Diane Selwyn's fantasy. The narrative mirrors this delirium, exerting a temporary state of mental confusion upon the spectator. In this way the spectator can feel the pain and agony that the film creates and which is centered round Diane's decent into the abyss of madness.

Right from the start of the film, our cognitive and auditory abilities are disturbed by an uncanny and

eerie sensation which affectively distances and makes us aware of what is unfolding. The images we see in the world of Diane's intricate fantasy are recognisable mythic forms; but something is wrong with these forms. They are hollow, filmic spectres; their glamour exorcised. These are the projections of a troubled mind. From this moment on we are released from traditional viewer expectations by a continual doubling of the twin senses of pleasure and pain. This is definitely not the logic of Hollywood that has enslaved us by years of formulaic falsehoods, even though Lynch works from within the very system that he effectively critiques and subverts.

The opening scene does just this. It starts off nostalgically revealing Diane's idealised fantasy yet this fantasy is exorcised abruptly thus allowing something else, something strange, something that enters the frame and displaces what has come before it. The images of the dancers that we see are nothing more than filmic projections, ghostly remnants of a place that only exists in the troubled mind of Dianne Selwyn. In doing this Lynch metaphorically pulls back the curtains, interrupting the way we see and relate to images of fantasy and nostalgia, both on screen and

how these images relate to our personal and collective identities and the influences that form and govern them.

Everything in Lynch's world acts as a double, hinting at Diane's bipolar disposition. Important characters seem more real than real, other characters seem to have something to hide, locations resonate with unreality, and props such as espresso cups, fireplaces, and telephones appear in an altered state; everything in Lynch's world echoes of paranoia, deceit, and fabrication.

Lynch's filmmaking does not conform to the regularities of illusionist story telling but deviates from these ideological orthodoxies by creating works of art that show both his love and distrust of this form. Lynch, all at once, embraces images of iconic mythic America: diners, Cadillacs, cowboys, yet exorcises these icons of their glamour by placing them in incongruous positions within the self-conscious world of the film, giving the narrative a dream-like unreality that follows the trajectory of a deranged mind. Every detail that we see resonates as if being viewed through some sort of filter. This filter, it

seems, is Diane's warped and troubled vision of her own idealised fantasy.

"Perhaps the best cinematic precursor to all this is *The Wizard of Oz*, where Dorothy fills the imaginary world of Oz with bizarre people and strange objects drawn from her own projected experiences and wishful fantasies".<sup>1</sup> But Diane can never be Dorothy and there is no happy ending; her delusions and fantasy will continue to eat away at her mind like a form of atrophy, always pushing her fantasy and sickness towards exposure.

The scenes after the jitterbug competition is a stark contrast to what came before it. We see from out of the blackness the ominous street sign that is the name of the film. Due to the atmosphere and the slow moving camera, seeing this sign signals the film's intent. No longer is this street sign an iconic marker of Hollywood, like that of *Sunset Boulevard*; it has now been striped of its illusory appeal and holds the power of trepidation. Again Lynch's concern with what is real and what is imaginary in society takes form. We now see this icon in a different light. Even from

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<sup>1</sup> Rush, Alan, B. Home page. 23 January, 2005.  
[http://www.themodernword.com/mulholland\\_drive.html](http://www.themodernword.com/mulholland_drive.html)

the first few minutes of the film Lynch shows us how easily the iconic signs and signifiers of Hollywood can be stripped of their appeal to reveal a far more sinister underbelly. Already the film holds the power of being able to exorcise object's appeal, to show their sinister underbelly. The actual title of the film, *Mulholland Dr.* then becomes as problematic as the film's depictions, all at once stirring nostalgia, but yet, heralding a darker side. All of the objects in the film act as doubles. Each has a dark reality that is greater than their illusion.

We witness the accident that strips Rita of her memory. She then stumbles down a slope towards the town. The amnesiac device has been used as a popular form, especially prevalent in the 1950s. Lynch resurrects cinematic forms and effectively plays with their malleability, stripping them of their glamour. We have all seen this before: the betrayed actress gone mad. The mobsters. The hit men. The murder suicide. All the old filmic clichés are used, but in a way that makes their use absurd through a surreal aesthetic. Dreams and aspirations covering profound pain, forms of power: social, sexual and monetary.

Nothing is exempt from scrutiny. Everything has another side that is later unearthed.

At the scene of the accident, two cops stand motionless, surveying the scene. They look familiar; we have seen these same forms in many other films. These characters, like the dancers in the first scene, look like cardboard cut-outs; everything about them has been denaturalised. One says to the other, "the boys found this on the floor, in the back of the Caddy," "could be unrelated," and then: "could be someone's missing, maybe".

What is revealed through Lynch's hyper-realistic use of formulaic genres and character types is that they have the all-encompassing power of being able to construct ideological worlds and beliefs by working from within a system that is considered to be a harmless and healthy entertainment. This system of capitalist escapism -the orthodox narrative- systematically provides collective pleasure and release from the mediocrities of the world through the affirmation of stereotypes. However, what is fascinating about Lynch's use of these popular forms is that, when they are parodied, the release effect of such forms is to do with *disturbance* rather than

*affirmation*. Here the Lynchian viewer is offered the temporary release from the orthodox sensibility of these forms. Through this strategy Lynch is able to show that his mentally disturbed characters are not technically mad, but rather, society itself is mad and these characters' illnesses are a reaction to this madness that makes their lives unliveable. Diane's descent into suicide may be seen like this. Her situation has become so unliveable that she has to create her idealised fantasy in order to cope with an unbearable life situation.

*Mulholland Dr.* skilfully plays with what is real and imaginary in the world of film. You cannot help but wonder while watching the film how this might relate to our lives. In this way the film skilfully turns back upon the spectator's images of social and urban decay.

The detective genre is used throughout. We are kept in suspense until the end, when the rational prowess of the detective should solve the crime and thus tie up any loose ends in the narrative. But Lynch turns these generic expectations on their head so that there is no resolution, no rational triumph. Justice, resolution and order are not restored. The celebration



of human logic and reason is no longer and the world of the film is made incomprehensible. What we do get instead, through the undermining of these generic conventions, and by seeing them through Diane's deforming fantasy is an unearthing of how these genres have somehow conditioned us into thinking and believing certain things, mostly false and sometimes dangerous.

If we look a little closer at Lynch's characters we notice their obvious robotic artificiality. The clichéd music, the hypercomposed flatness of the mise-en-scene and the deliberate angelic lighting, are techniques that Lynch uses to distance us from the illusion of reality. It is as if every prop in the film is trying to tell us something: the cops, the dwarf, the golf club, the cowboy, the stuttering light, the crackling fire. But meaning is not to be found, these are just signs, cinematic ghosts. Meaning eludes us. This is all a fantasy. This is not a case of "someone is missing" but, rather, "something is missing". The police are not of any use in a cinematic world, how could they be; they are not real. In the world of the film, meaning and logic, as we think them to be, are constructed in opposition to what we think

to be normal cinematic sense. What is missing? The cinematic systems of logic construction are made redundant. Lacking this system of sense making, what is left? What might the spectator see that has otherwise been obscured? Simple. The spectator is able to see what has otherwise been hidden behind an ideological smoke screen: the other side of the dream -the darkness that consumes Diane Selwyn.

The landscapes of *Mulholland Dr.* are littered with filmic remnants, and Lynch skilfully reuses these forms to reveal their ideological influences. In doing this he abruptly exorcises them of their glamour and appeal by revealing them to be deceptive forms. In doing this Lynch reveals the two-fold nature of his representations. His methods, derived from modernist painters such as the Surrealists, give him the power to both represent and exorcise the filmic image of its chronic ideological influence. "In this balance", argues Nochimson, "we find that he taps into the vitality of Hollywood and is often a corrective to the lies and repression involved in Hollywood's pretence of a rationalist form of realism".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nochimson, Martha. *The Passion of David Lynch*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 14.

The first part of the film seems to be Diane's fantasy just before she dies. The failing and psychotic Diane fantasises herself as Betty, a naïve young starlet, intent on Hollywood stardom. Betty is Diane's idealised distorted mirror image of herself, perhaps one of her many personalities. Dianne also fantasises Camilla in the role of the amnesiac Rita, the accident victim from the first scene's car crash, which was Diane's murder attempt. In Diane's idealised fantasy the two women meet, make friends and then fall in love whilst trying to unravel the mystery of Rita's amnesia. This, it seems, is all a fantasy that is slowly unravelling in Diane's mind. The narrative mirrors her problematic grasp of reality by turning everything it touches into sickness.

In this way *Mulholland Dr.* mocks its quixotic protagonists "who envision their everyday experience through a deforming cinematic lenses."<sup>3</sup> In the first half of the film Betty and Rita are movie clichés. Betty, the archetypal naïve starlet seems to have just walked out of Wellman's *A Star is Born* (1937), and

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Stam. *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) p. 135

Rita, after forgetting her name, chooses it as she gazes at a poster of Rita Hayworth in Charles Vidor's *Gilda* (1946).

In its existential concern with what is real and what is imaginary in society, *Mulholland Dr.* is an abnormality that has skilfully created a niche for itself from within the system it seeks to critique. All of Lynch's images are skilfully planned and tug between pure dream and an indecipherable narrative logic. Ebert agrees:

Mulholland Dr. is all dream. There is nothing that is intended to be a waking moment. Like real dreams, it does not explain, does not complete its sequences, lingers over what it finds fascinating, dismisses unpromising plotlines. If you want an explanation for the last half hour of the film, think of it as the dreamer rising slowly to consciousness, as threads from the dream fight for space with recent memories from real life, and with fragments of other dreams - old ones and those still in development.<sup>4</sup>

Like his earlier films *Mulholland Dr.* creates a new reality, one that distorts shapes, colours, life;

it imitates dreams, fantasies and free associations by transformations of time and space and the disquieting introduction of nostalgic and alien objects into the cinematic frame. Like Ebert argues, nothing is intended to be a waking moment. Everything is a fantasy that can only lead to despair as it slowly rises to consciousness. Lynch's narrative follows the logic of a nightmare, and in doing this subverts the logic of a linear narrative revealing the dangers of the Hollywood dream factory and its ability to drive "mad" anyone who succumbs to the dream. Through dreams Lynch is "interested in orchestrating visual and aural effects to evoke a certain mood, aura, atmosphere or association, often one of disease, the uncanny or the sublime, rather than producing coherent cause and effect narratives".<sup>5</sup> Within these dreams every little detail is utilised to question the status quo and to show that behind the façade of Hollywood and illusory practice there lies an alternative truth.

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<sup>4</sup> Ebert, Roger. Sun Times. 12 January 2005.  
<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Tasker, Yvonne. *Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 246.

The inability to fully describe and understand *Mulholland Dr.* by orthodox filmic understanding is interesting as it presents a direct confrontation to how we normally describe and understand narrative structure. In other words, what *Mulholland Dr.*'s narrative achieves through mirroring Dianne's paranoid delusions is a direct confrontation with how we perceive a "normal" work of art or film narrative. To this end it is arguable that the film was never meant to be fully explained or understood, but in fact, that Lynch created the film to ultimately have the effect of delirium produced through an unorthodox narrative structure that follows the indecipherable logic of Dianne/Betty's descent into madness.

In doing this, the spectator cannot be influenced by the usual glamour that is inherent in an orthodox narrative as this glamour is exorcised of its untoward effects by revealing its darker side. This situates the film in direct confrontation to what we normally expect from a film, for of course part of the pleasure of watching a film is connecting with its glamorous forms and working through its clues to unravel a mystery that allows us to unwittingly naturalise the ideologies present.

Through this the film becomes impossible to decode using the logic we have been conditioned to using through years of submitting to the cinematic dream. There are no revelations to be found, no meaning, no reward. There is no mystery. There is no puzzle, just confoundedness. But out of this erupts the ability to identify the constructedness of these forms: the cops, the Hollywood dream, Mulholland Drive, all ghosts from a cinematic past that never existed. These forms only exist in our minds and are what drives Diane Selwyn to suicide.

Just after the scene where Adam is told by the Mexican hotel owner, Cookie, that there is a problem with his credit cards, Adam is told that he must meet a mysterious figure called The Cowboy at a corral at the top of Beachwood canyon. This is the type of scene that Lynch loves as it takes the filmic archetype of the cowboy and makes its use incongruous for metafilmic effect.

Adam arrives at the corral. A low rumbling is heard. A light bulb stutters below a buffalo skull nailed to a beam. Lynch's auditory genius is set in motion. All objects in this scene are filmic signs. But every object is made strange. The Cowboy appears;

his appearance is surreal: this is certainly no John Wayne. The Cowboy says, "A man's attitude goes some way to the way his life will be. Is that somethin' you might agree with? And then, "Now, did you answer because you thought that was what I wanted to hear, or did you think about what I said and answer because you truly believe that to be right?" The rest of this scene continues with this sort of indecipherable dialogue until The Cowboy tells Adam that he must cast a particular girl for his film. If he does he will see The Cowboy one more time. If not, he will see him twice more, with the implied suggestion that he will kill Adam if he does not cast "the girl".

This scene is impossibly cryptic. We can still fathom what The Cowboy wants and intends but his appearance is never explained. He just is. It is as if his placement in the world of the film is trying to tell us something. But meaning eludes us: these filmic signs follow an indecipherable logic that goes in any direction they please. On the level of narrative coherence *Mulholland Dr.* is littered with scenes like this. They play no part other than in the flaunting of their own artificiality. They are an overt and relentless assemblage of cinematic signs with no



discernable logic gathered from the mind projections of the mentally unstable Diane Selwyn.

It is of importance to recognise that a great deal of people will not be able to enjoy Lynch's films because of their resistance and inability to let themselves go and enjoy the visceral experience of his work, rather, they will continue to indulge in the repetitive and ideological affirmative narratives to which they have become so accustomed. Unfortunately this is often the case with Lynch's work, as spectators do not understand, because of their cinematic conditioning, the subversive importance of Lynch's oeuvre.

*Mulholland Dr.* engages its concerns through a dream/nightmare aesthetic that reveals the twofold nature of not only everything within the film but also everything within life. Lynch creates filmic worlds that are both at once fantastic yet also have the ability to reveal that fantasy has a dangerous side. In this way every image within Lynch's films act as a double: the twin poles of climax and anticlimax, hyper-realisation and denaturalisation, enchantment and disenchantment. Diane's failing grasp on reality

is the key to all this. The narrative mirrors Diane's madness both in content and form.

The camera is the catalyst to making problematic the distinction between what is real and what is imagined. It works towards disrupting and falsifying any identification with modes of orthodox cinematic understanding. Shots do not always follow the gaze. The camera is not the observer; rather, it seems to have abandoned its cinematic constructs to dizzying effect. The camera moves as if searching for something that does not exist in the frame, something that is causing the pain of the characters: A something that is causing our pain. A something that has caused Diane's sickness. To this effect, emotions are stirred and a sense of ever impending doom surfaces. We are made aware through this of the horror and sickness that Lynch's characters embody.

The scene in Winkie's Dinner personifies this. The camera searches from behind the character's head, bobbing and swaying as if suffering from vertigo. It observes, but not from the character's or the director's point of view. It is simply there, moving, present, searching, part of the film and not part of the film; an effect that all at once makes us aware,

eludes us, seduces and frightens us, effectively disorientating our recognition yet stimulating it on another level. Our eyes are moving over the canvas of the film, but we cannot identify with its images. Everything is made unreal. This is film that makes problematic the distinction between what is real and what is imagined, a category of madness.

This is what gives the film a sense of foreboding that hits us on a visceral level: the other side of the fantasy of film. For Lynch, the dream is the impending doom, the aesthetic of the film and the sickness of his characters. The dramatic character is one of Lynch's targets. Although the characters within the world of the film may appear to be real people, they are composed not of flesh and blood but are constructed from the filmic repertoires of our minds through Lynch's hyperrealist use of filmic types.

The camera work in the film seems never to be still, it is always searching for something just out of our view. Lynch does this in a way that makes us uneasy. This is emphasised in a pivotal scene in Club Silencio. Betty and Rita watch a strange man and a singer illustrating the illusion of performance. This emphasis on the reality/illusion is clearly a

reference to the film itself and to the problematic grasp Diane has on reality. This scene may also be a reference to Lynch's personal concerns: what is real and what is imagined in life? Club Silencio is the key to all this, it suggests not only the fallacy of Dianne's dreams but also mirrors this fallacy in the falseness of its representations. "There is no band," we are told. What we are watching is not real, what we think is real, is not. This is just a film. All films are Club Silencio.

Cookie the hotel owner makes an appearance as a different character. He introduces a beautiful singer. She sings but after a while collapses. The singing continues: it is all a mime. There is no inherent connection between image and meaning and reality. Image is arbitrary. *No hay banda* shouts the ominous man, "there is no band". "This is all a tape recording". "*No hay banda* and yet we hear a band." "It is all a tape". What we think of as life is often an illusion. What is real in the world of the film? What is real in the world of the film within the film? What is real and imagined in the real world?

Just like in *Adaptation* the power of Hollywood and its domination over artists and actors is also part of

Lynch's sub-plots. *Mulholland Dr.* is thus, partly, the self-mocking cry of Lynch himself, at odds with a creativity that is taken, dismantled, edited, and reproduced or even unproduced in a different form that has previously attempted to rob his art of its distinctive and intangible qualities. This seems to be part of the bigger picture the film creates, as this in itself is a meta-commentary on the film's troubled production history. *Mulholland Dr.* was originally a 88 minute pilot for ABC, but suffice to say the network, on viewing the original content, decided that it was too weird for mainstream viewing and cancelled it. It also becomes clearer that Lynch's target within the film is Hollywood itself. The film then exposes the angst and burden of Lynch himself.

One subplot involves movie director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux) and some mysterious men who are threatening Kesher unless he casts Camilla in the leading role of his new film. They produce a photo of Rita who has mysteriously turned into the blonde Camilla. Adam is drawn to Betty but is bullied by the studio's thugs to cast Camilla in the leading role. This shadowy ensemble of men who seem to have a foothold on the industry are represented by the all-

too familiar gangster troupe. The troupe of the blonde bombshell is also of interest here as it depicts a personified depiction of the Hollywood ideal that is ultimately deprived of their full agency by the fragmented nature of their sexual representations. Their sexual power is only valid as long as the fickle nature of the star system bestows it upon them. This Hollywood ideal is what destroys Diane Selwyn, as this is what she craves and imagines her life to be until her fantasy is unmasked.

Lynch addresses the abuse of women, both mentally and physically at the hands of the industry. Betty and Rita's demise serves as a telling indictment of Hollywood misogyny, the way the system forces, discards, and enchants women, both mentally and physically, into certain roles.

*Mulholland Dr.* is not only a film about film; it is a film that all at once both embraces film, yet reveals its influences as dangerous; the narrative destabilising characteristics of Diane's false dream make this so. This is film that purges itself of illusion through the unmaking of this illusion. From within the very systems that have created an architecture of hegemony and ideology, Lynch's

dreamscapes function to not only displace traditional narrative logic but also to question the human condition and how the illusionary practices of cinema have instilled certain beliefs and ideals upon us. All of Lynch's characters are quixotic in their pursuit of unrealistic and unreachable goals. In this way Lynch stresses that society is "sick" and that his characters' "illness'" are simply a reaction to an unliveable situation.

### **Chapter III**

#### **The Matrix**

*Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potential liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death.*

-R. D. Laing

The Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix*(1999) travels down a well-trodden path with its paranoid concern with what is real and what is imaginary. Its use of a protagonist that is also paranoid and later assumes a role akin to the messiah is also a theme common to madness and its representations in film, theatre, and literature. These filmic concerns in which our own day to day reality is questioned is mirrored in the film's own use of modern technologies which seamlessly warp and construct the reality on screen to such an extent that we may be unsure, like Neo himself, of what is real and what is not. The question is whether or not, in terms of Laing's above quote and Foucault's theory of madness, the film uses madness in such a way as to



be a form of critical insight or as a playful and uncritical generic form.

The whole of *The Matrix* seems to be based around the fact, either through its narrative or its special effects, that "reality" is either, malleable, somehow an illusion, or a paranoid delusion. The film also addresses a host of anxieties from malevolent computers to conspiracies, themes that have always been common to science fiction films.

For its protagonist Neo, the first part of the film is the ultimate paranoid nightmare, drawn from the fear and suspicion that reality is not what he thinks it is, and that there is a malevolent conspiracy to keep everyone under control. The second part of the film can be read as plunging Neo into an even more powerful fantasy: the narcissistic dream that "he is special, and is the messiah, and the rules do not apply to him, even if they do for everyone else." Of course it is entirely possible that Neo is imagining all that happens in the film and that he has suffered a schizophrenic break with reality. If this is so, then it might be possible to apply Foucault's theory of madness to the film, as the filmmakers' may have succeeded in engaging the spectator on an

existentially critical level by using the critical form of "madness", both through the content and form of the narrative, to highlight what society may perceive as being mad, but in fact cannot be because it is meaningful in the content of the film.

In this way, for Foucault, argues Gutting, "madness speaks through art, but only in the sense that madness is a reaction to the madness that destroys it. We see madness in art only through the violence it does to art".<sup>1</sup> In other words, what may appear to be "mad" in cinema holds the potential to make visible what is assumed to be not mad: the dominant social order. If this is detectible in *The Matrix*, the film, nor its protagonist, can be "mad", even if they may appear mad in the socially determined sense. This would also place the film in the special category of metafilm.

If this is the case, Neo's delusions might be seen as being akin to the real and imagined in madness. The film's projected unease and manipulation of its own filmic reality may also signal the filmmakers' concerns with what is real and meaningful

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<sup>1</sup> Gutting, Gary. *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) p. 263

in society. The manipulation of the film's reality starts right from its beginning with the Warner Bro's logo. As mentioned in the introduction, the manipulation of the logo might point to the film's intension: that the manipulation of filmic reality is a postmodern game. Or then again this may point to the filmmakers' personal problematic grasp of reality, and their existential and philosophical concerns with what is real and what is imagined: a category of madness. However, at this stage it is too early to tell whether or not the film will attempt to be critical by using a mentally unstable protagonist who might possibly be only dreaming that the "real" earth is a negative utopia that he has been sent to save.

After the manipulation of the logo we see green cascading code, thousands of lines of it. This is important imagery as this is the computer code that creates and maintains the illusion of the real in the simulation of the world within the film. This is the foundation of the simulated world, the very fabric of the illusion or possible delusion that has been plaguing Neo for years. This is what perhaps Neo imagines the fabric of reality to be, a deceptive

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malleable form that is controlled and manipulated by some unseen force or entity. This scene may also point to the fact that society, to use Baudrillard's term, has become reliant on the hyperreal. The cascading code may be the simulation, and that this simulation, far from being a true picture of reality, is nothing more than the melding together of the real and the simulated into a new vision of reality: the hyperreal. In accordance with the plot of the film, the masses have become a society of spectators, totally dependent on the images projected to them as referents of the world in which they live.

Next, the camera zooms into the binary code and it starts to take a recognisable form. A light appears in the distance, it gets bigger and bigger. As if moving through a dark canal the code gives birth to a recognisable form. This is the overt transition from digital code to the illusion of the "real" it creates to blind humanity from their enslavement. Trinity (Carrie-Anne-Moss) and Cypher (Joe Pantoliano) are heard taking over what they think is a secure line from which they can travel from the real world into the computer simulation of the real world.

The camera zooms in to the distant light that becomes a policeman's torch. The scene is set in a typical generic frame; film noir. Film noir, as Susan Hayward argues, "emerged from a period of political insecurity: 1941-1958, the time of the Second World War and The Cold War. In the United States this was a time of repressed insecurity and paranoia".<sup>2</sup> This period lead to a style of filmmaking that reflected its insecurities and is still reminiscent today, arguably in a slightly different form. It is interesting that *The Matrix* uses film noir. It may be attempting to use this filmic style to express visually and aurally the critical tone that the film wishes to set, endeavouring to reflect the angst and darkness of Neo's mind and the concerns of the filmmakers, or alternatively this may be just a fashionable pastiche of a critical filmic form.

Officers are in a corridor, outside a door. They kick the door open. Trinity is seen sitting in the hotel room, her back to the group of policemen. The scene cuts to outside the building. Gathered round a few police cars are more policemen. In pulls an

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<sup>2</sup> Hayward, Susan. *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 128

ominous black car. Men in black suits and dark glasses emerge. We later find out that these men are "agents"; computer programs that hunt and destroy any threat to the simulated world.

The scene cuts back to the hotel room. The officer readies his cuffs and approaches Trinity. With inhuman precision she swings round and kicks the officer. Cinematic time pauses as if someone has pushed the slow-motion button on a video remote and Trinity is suspended in mid air. For a brief second Trinity stays still as if meditating: the camera moves round her as if she is fused in time and space. Time restarts and she dispatches the first officer with a deadly kick. Within a mere second she moves with impossible speed, running round the wall of the hotel room, to kill the remaining officers.

The agents and more officers are seen making their way to the hotel room. They spot Trinity as she leaves the room and a chase ensues. The men relentlessly pursue her as she death-defyingly and inhumanly jumps from building top to building top, a scene that is reminiscent Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). Trinity must find a phone in order to leave the

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simulation so that her consciousness can return to her body in the "real" world. She runs and jumps from rooftop to rooftop until she comes to a dead-end where she hurtles herself through an impossibly small window in the side of a building. On leaving the building she hears the phone ringing that she must pick up in order to leave the simulation. As she runs towards the phone box one of the agents drives a huge truck at her. She reaches the phone just in time as the truck impacts with the phone box. She escapes.

For the first ten minutes of the film we are kept alert by sight and sound and impossible human abilities. Filmic time and space start and stop as if the film is being edited as we watch. This is a world where time and space can be manipulated for superhuman effect. This filmic world is similar to a dream world, a world in which nothing is impossible, and a fantasy world that might be seen as being a creation of the mind: a paranoid dream. Later we find out that Trinity is hunting for the film's protagonist, Neo, who is also being pursued by agents. Neo is a computer hacker whom Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburne) believes is the "one", the promised one who will set humankind free from its enslavement. Neo suffers from disturbing

dreams and sleepless nights. He has always had that uneasy feeling that something is not right about the world. He has been searching for that "something" for years.

Directly after Trinity's escape from the agents, the scene shifts to Neo's dingy apartment. Neo has been asleep at his desk. This scene enables the possibility that what we have just seen has been a paranoid dream in Neo's head. A computer monitor next to him flashes repeatedly the text: "Wake up Neo". Next this message appears on the screen: "Follow the white rabbit". This has the obvious connection with Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-glass* (1872), when Alice follows the white rabbit into the hole and enters an underworld. The white rabbit in this case, turns out to be a white rabbit tattoo on the shoulder of a woman who comes to Neo's door. There is also a guy at the door who states that Neo is looking a little whiter than usual, Neo responds by saying, "you ever have that feeling where you are not sure if you are awake or still dreaming?" Neo goes with the people to a nightclub: he follows the white rabbit.

This scene might suggest that what we have been seeing and from this point onwards are Neo's complex



deluded fantasies. His possible mental illness may have just triggered something akin to a schizophrenic break. Neo's monotonic emotionless tone throughout the whole movie may also signal his schizophrenia. This would, perhaps, disqualify him as the "one" or Messiah, but possibly point to a clinical symptom of schizophrenia. The entire framework of the Matrix and Neo's special place in it, from the persecution he faces for no real reason, to the fact that he is the one, or just imagines himself as the one, all might point towards what many schizophrenics experience as their own realities. While many sufferers have more mundane illusions of being watched or controlled, psychiatrists and psychologists use the term "paranoid delusions" to describe the experience of alien abductions, people upstairs controlling your thoughts, or that the phone might be bugged.

The woman with the white rabbit tattoo is with another man that buys a computer disk with illegal information from Neo. The man tells Neo that he is his "savior, his Jesus Christ", once again reinforcing for Neo his possible messiah delusion. Neo meets Trinity at the nightclub. Trinity tells Neo that she is aware of his desire to know what the Matrix is. "It is the

question that brought you here. What is the Matrix?" After this scene an alarm clock rings and once again Neo appears to wake up. The film at this stage is playing with the idea that Neo is dreaming, making the narrative hard to read.

After Neo has woken for what seems like the second time, he is seen in a meeting with his manager after arriving late to work. His manager says, "You have a problem with authority, Mr. Anderson". Neo is his alias as a computer hacker; his name in the "real world" is Thomas Anderson. The manager tells Mr. Anderson in no uncertain terms that he will lose his job if he is late again. Mr. Anderson's reality seems rather mundane compared to the complex fantasy world that he has possibly created in his head. Even the fact that Neo has another name may be a clue to his personality split.

The stakes are raised as the agents arrive to take in Mr. Anderson for questioning. Morpheus attempts to help; he calls Neo on a cell phone and tries to direct him out of the building before the agents can get to him. The agents capture Neo and implant a device in his stomach. Neo wakes as if this had all been a dreadful dream. The phone rings and it

is Morpheus. Neo's paranoid dream has again crossed over into his reality.

Mysterious strangers whom he does not know visit him; however, they know what the Matrix is. These strangers inform Neo that the Matrix is a computer-generated reality in which he lives, and that the computer program is controlled by artificial intelligence that has taken over the earth. The year is actually sometime late in the 22nd century.

The humans remove the device from Neo's stomach. Neo meets Morpheus face to face. Morpheus believes Neo is "The One". The one they have been searching for, who will lead them into a new world. In order to show Neo what he believes to be true, he must show him the door: The Door out of the Matrix. Morpheus offers Neo the choice between two pills. "You take the blue pill the story ends - you wake up in your bed and believe, whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill - you stay in Wonderland, and I show you just how deep the rabbit hole goes."

Morpheus' offer to Neo to unfurl his world as a lie, a hoax is perhaps a reference to modern neurochemistry and the argument that medications like the anti-depressant Prozac and psycho-stimulants like

Ritalin have been the subject of much speculation among conspiracy theorists, since they have a success rate in transforming rebellious or difficult children and adults into compliant and often passive conformist consumers. Neo is given the choice of the two pills, and decides on wonderland. This scene seems to also be playing with the idea that Neo has taken something similar to LSD and is hallucinating a drug induced illusion. Lysergic Acid Diethylamide is a hallucinogenic drug that alters the way the user perceives the world around them, so it is quite fitting that Neo has to take a pill to experience the imagined "real world".

Before breaking out of what he thinks is the Matrix, what Neo thought to be his life was an illusion. It was a lie. Morpheus, whose name, quite fittingly means: god of dreams, described it as a "dream world," but a dream you cannot wake from. As Morpheus explained to Neo, there was a catastrophic war between the humans and the machines, after the humans had produced AI, a sentient robot gave birth to a race of its own, and a catastrophic war started. It is not known whether machine or human started the war, but it did follow a long period of technological

advancement. To try to end the war the humans "scorched the sky", blocking out the sun's rays, in an attempt at machine genocide, since the machines needed solar power to survive. This attempt by the humans was unsuccessful. In response and retaliation the machines subdued the humans and made them into power-cells. Each human now floats in a womblike environment, while feeding on their nutrients energises the machines. All this once again might be read as Neo's complex fantasy.

What we have just seen has either been a paranoid fantasy with critical intent or a filmic game that plays with the generic motifs of madness. This is the question. The whole of *The Matrix* may be read as the projected fantasy of its protagonist Neo. At the start of the film it is reasonable to deduce that Neo may have suffered some sort of schizophrenic breakdown from reality and that the rest of the film is a fever dream in which he imagines that he inherits superhuman powers and saves the world from its unseen bondage. This, I believe, is a common delusion of the severely mentally ill. It is of interest here to examine why the film uses the motif of paranoia and madness as the theme of the film. The film's main concern seems to be

that what we think of as real may just be a simulation and that nothing can ever be a certainty. This problematic fantasy/reality paradox is mirrored in the film's use of amazing technology that blurs the line between illusion and reality itself. It is also mirrored in the film's schizophrenic-like use of a plethora of myths and genre conventions.

The first scene where Trinity is chased from building top to building top is awash with filmic signs and signifiers, its mythic genre conventions put on display, easily recognisable forms with the blatant reuse of the icons and signifiers of thriller and film noir. The policemen, the cars, the buildings, the lighting, the music, are all cinematic ghosts. These popular mythic forms are on display within the world of the film, created in front of our eyes by the cascading code that slowly gives birth to these forms in the first scene.

These are the formulaic motifs that have been passed down to construct cinematic forms from popular literary traditions. Film that starts and stops, bends and warps to engage us with fantastic images that could only take place in Neo's paranoid dreams or in the malleable world of science fiction film. Cinema is

a constructed universe where time and space are plastic, like the world of a dream or fantasy. Everything that we see has a questionable "reality" that might be read as being akin to Neo's unstable grasp on reality. This questioning of reality has triggered a wave of fashionable concerns about our own "realities" and the way that we are conditioned, through an ideological apparatus similar to the Matrix itself, to accept these forms of persuasive conditioning..

*The Matrix* is also full of self-referential cultural artefacts. References are abound: Baudrillard, Lacan, Buddhism, Christianity, nothing is exempt from cinematic hijacking. These diverse allusions form a polysemic pastiche of cultural fragments. Even the names of characters are references and draw from historical forms. Neo is a Christ-like figure who follows in a tradition of characters like Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*(1977). Neo is the Greek word for new and is also an anagram for "one", suggesting that he, as stated in the film, is the one, the saviour of humankind. Trinity is also a biblical word and Morpheus was the Greek god of dreams. Movies are also referenced directly. The earliest movie is

The Wizard of Oz (1939) which is referenced when Cypher says "buckle your seatbelt, Dorothy, because Kansas is going bye-bye".

The paranoia themes of the 1950s are also rekindled in a slightly different form. In the 1950s, America was paranoid about the bomb. Hollywood echoed this fear by making movies that were parables of the atomic age. Now it seems that the paranoia that was evident in the 1950s is based more on a nightmare vision of a future postmodern society. For humanity the simulation has become the real. This nightmare vision of a dystopia also seems to be a fashionable theme that the postmodern science fiction genre reuses time and time again. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) heralded this type of postmodern paranoid cinema, itself based on Phillip K. Dick's paranoid literary work, *Do Android Dream of Electric Sheep?*

There are also a host of modernist art and literary references. As mentioned, the film's debt to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-glass* (1872) is also explicit with "follow the white rabbit" subplots and several references to "rabbit holes". Carroll's work is also an important motif as *Through the Looking-glass* has, since the 1960s, been associated



with hallucinogenics and madness. The most important of all, perhaps, is a reference to René Magritte's painting under which was written in laborious penmanship *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (This is not a pipe).<sup>3</sup> This famous Surrealist painting is directly alluded to when a young boy dressed as a Buddhist monk at the Oracle's house is seen bending a spoon. He states directly to Neo that "there is no spoon", and the spoon is seen to bend to reveal the malleable nature of the world's false reality.

Magritte's painting is of a pipe but in actual fact it is only a representation of a pipe, in other words paint on a canvas that is positioned to give the illusion of a pipe. René Magritte (1898-1967) was a famous Belgian surrealist painter and an arch modernist. Influenced by Giorgio Chirico (1888-1978), he developed a style in which misleading realism is combined with mocking irony. His works are elaborate fantasies constructed around common situations. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* might be read as a metaphor for Neo's possible unstable and paranoid gasp of reality. "There is no spoon" not only reveals itself in

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<sup>3</sup> See also Michel Foucault's book *This is Not a Pipe*.

reference to another work but also may metaphorically continues the filmmakers' concern with what is real and what is imagined in bourgeois society.

Motifs of mirrors are also prevalent, suggesting the self-reflexive nature of the film. If you watch closely, you will see reflections constantly; often in the ubiquitous sunglasses that the heroes and villains wear. Mirrors are always shattered in the film, perhaps suggesting, as does Donald's film *The 3*, in *Adaptation*, the protagonist's fragmented, multi-faced self: again a possible well-used filmic reference to a form of madness. Morpheus is also held prisoner in a mirrored skyscraper and Neo sees his reflection in the spoon that is being bent by the boy in a monk's outfit. All these reflective surfaces may reflect Neo's paranoid fear of being watched. Mirrors reveal how we see and distort the "reality" of the outside world and how the mirroring of mythic motifs creates our own sense of reality. The motif of lenses also might be understood as the filter to how we see the world. Our reality is composed of looking through a reassuring lens that reflects back and filters the dominant ideals and myths of society.

As mentioned, the premise of the film is that humanity has become enslaved by a race of machines that use human bodies as power cells. The Matrix, then, is an interactive virtual environment that involves systematic global deception. The humans are completely unaware of their situation. Everything seems normal as the machines feed the humans a simulation of reality. Everything the humans now think to be real is in fact a computer-generated illusion. This is emphasised by the scene where humans float in a womb-like environment, unaware of their true predicament.

This womb-like environment might, if the film was read in such a way, be taken for a metaphor of cinema itself. In the theatre environment we are also, to some extent, held captive and fed nutrients in the form of images by machines. The theatre, in fact, is very similar to a womb. It is a warm dark environment where we too are held captive and fed images that sustain our own sense of reality, albeit a distorted and conditioning sense of reality. These images often are ideological in their influences on us, masking and influencing our perception of reality in our lives.

On a larger scale, in society we are constantly bombarded by images that seek to pull the wool over our eyes and to condition us to certain beliefs and ideals. Computers and the Internet also play a major role in being technologies of domination. Our lives are controlled, regulated and monitored by computers that seem similar to the unseen presence in *The Matrix*. The domination that the Matrix has over humanity might also be considered as being similar to Foucault's Panopticon.<sup>4</sup> The Panopticon allows seeing without being seen and therefore a silent form of domination. The Panopticon prison system, which was popular in the early nineteenth century, was designed to allow guards to see their prisons, but not allow prisoners to see guards. The building was circular, with prisoners' cells lining the outer diameter, and in the centre of the circle was a large, central observational tower. Each cell extends the entire length of the building. All the occupants of the cells are thus backlit and isolated from one another by walls. At any given time, guards could be looking down into each prisoner's cells - and thereby monitor

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<sup>4</sup> See Foucault's *Discipline & Punish : The Birth of the Prison*.

potentially unmoral behaviour. Carefully placed blinds prevented prisoners from seeing the guards, thereby leaving them paranoid that they were being "watched" at any given moment. In a sense this is also like George Orwell's description of the Big Brother effect in that you are always being watched and controlled.<sup>5</sup>

In a defining scene in *The Matrix*, Morpheus and Neo engage in a fight that pushes their bodies beyond possible human ability. Legs kick at impossible speed and angles; bodies contort in a flurry of kung fu moves. Gravity seems to take on new possibilities as the pair fling themselves through the air and cling to walls as if wearing suction caps. "Jesus Christ he's fast", states one of the characters, "take a look at his neural kinetics!"

"What are you waiting for? You're faster than this," challenges Morpheus. Neo's punches reach impossible speed and are seen to move at breakneck speed as if a multiplication of hands as he attacks Morpheus. This scene was done, I believe, using multiple cameras to film at multiple angles to achieve the effect. These action sequences were filmed and

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<sup>5</sup> See George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*

then re-mastered on computer to achieve the final effects.

This scene like many others before it, due to its overt manipulation of reality, makes the impossible appear possible and might be read as Neo imagining himself as having superhuman powers. Also similar is the scene in which Neo and the agent confront each other at the train station. The hyperkinetic motions of these two bodies, motions that are so fast they can only be made visible to us through the manipulation of the film's reality. This scene also deliberately alludes to the shoot-out tradition of the western. As the action unfolds, staunch, slow motion techniques recycle the highly stylised methods familiar to the audience from early westerns. *The Matrix* also alludes to other genres in this scene, which include the martial arts film.

Neo, the saviour of humanity, is expected to turn the tide in favour of the human uprising, the "awakening," by shifting the balance, by making the leap, both literally and metaphorically from ordinary man to demigod. And this of course he accomplishes. While Morpheus's crew can leap improbable distances, sustain an inhuman amount of damage, take out SWAT

teams single-handed, and so forth, they are still limited to certain rules within the Matrix. They can bend, and even break, some of the rules of the Matrix, but not all of them. They cannot simply override its tyranny, because only "the one" can do this. At present they are all still restricted by the confines of their minds, still working to eradicate the old program imposed upon them by the AI. Hence Morpheus's training of Neo, the chosen one.

Of course Neo must die to be reborn. Neo gets caught within the Matrix and has to fight for his life, but is overcome by enemy agents and shot at point blank range, appears to succumb to doubt, and dies.

Meanwhile, in the real world, Trinity comes to the rescue, firmly persuaded at last that he is the one. She whispers in his ear, "You must be the one, because I love you." Neo's fantasy, represented here in perhaps the most simple and stirring poetic image there is—the lovers' kiss—resurrects Neo. It sets him free. He is raised up, reborn. The agents resume their attack, but Neo simply shrugs and shakes his head, his god-like status or possible fantasy has now been reached.

By the end of the movie—which is indeed but the beginning of the story—Neo has attained his true status as an enlightened soul. He is "the one". Following his resurrection Neo stops the bullets and dives inside the agent Smith and so explodes him from within. This is the moment in which he is fully recognized as the one and where his possible delusional fantasy becomes fully realised.



## **Conclusion**

### ***The Possibility of Madness***

*What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is only related to objects, and not to individuals, or to life.*

-Michel Foucault

Madness has had a long, treacherous, and symbiotic relationship with art and society, ever since the romantics first rebelled against rationalism. Foucault's radical archaeology of scientific reason revealed that works that fit into such categories as mad, deviant, violent, transgressive, and marginal have played an important subversive role in counteracting bourgeois ethics, morals and truths. Gutting argues that for Foucault,

art offers our main hope of breaking out of the lies and self-deceptions of bourgeois values. His analysis of would-be sciences of man are consistently

deflations of what they claim, but his analyses of artistic works are appreciations of what they offer.<sup>1</sup>

This madness and the art and literature that it works through, in the wake of heroic artists such as Goya and DeSade, has silently been providing an auto-critique from within various forms of "meta" artistic expression. These forms of modernist art and the madness that opens them out into the world have become the symptom of society's illness, but a symptom that has the power to illuminate the lies and illusory self-deceptions of bourgeois values and ideals. So for Foucault, argues Gutting, "madness speaks through art, but only in the sense that madness is a reaction to the madness that destroys it. We see madness in art only through the violence it does to art".<sup>2</sup> In other words, what appears to be "mad" in a work of art holds the potential to make visible what is assumed to be not mad: the dominant social order.

This thesis has explored whether this critical form of "madness" is detectible in recent films. Film, like any other form of artistic expression, holds the

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<sup>1</sup> Gutting, Gary. *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) p. 98

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 263

possibility of utilising madness in its subversive form, but this is not to say that all film is able to do this. Metafilm holds the possibility of madness as a subversive device. In its critical modernist form, metafilm that utilises the subversive potential of "madness" turns inwards on itself reflecting its critical ideas through the existential angst of the artist. Through metafilms potential use of madness as a form of ontological enquiry, questions maybe metaphorically raised through the film's interruptions, of and about society, and thus how the power structures of dominant ideology influence us and are maintained and upheld.

As discussed, this special form of madness might potentially work through the content and form of the filmic narrative, a strategy that is able to disrupt and challenge the seamless and given nature of the classical orthodox narrative system, by denaturalising its representations, making the distinction between its protagonist's grasp of fantasy and reality problematic, and in doing so turn the ontological inquiry and existential angst of the filmmaker back onto the spectators. The result of this effect is that

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society may recognise their culpability for a protagonist whose demise and mental decline is at the hands of a system that is unliveable. This society deems them insane and in a reassuring gesture to reaffirm its own sanity ties to sensor and silence all forms of untoward communication.

As this thesis has shown, Foucault's modernist analysis of art presents a major problem when looking at the cinematic reflections of this late capitalist period. This has been the question that this thesis has asked of its three films: Can this special form of madness still operate as a subversive device? Can a return to modernist subversive metafilmic practice still be detected in recent film?

Let us return to my three chosen films to gage this question. There is no argument that *Adaptation* self-indulgently destroys and plays havoc with our "normal" filmic sensibility through a strategy of filmic disruption that seems to be centered round the troubled mind of its struggling screenwriter, Charlie Kaufman, and that this strategy might be seen as following in a long tradition of art and literature that position centre stage the angst and psychic conflict of the artist at odds against a cruel world.

In this lies the possibility that "madness" as Foucault conceived it might be working within the film itself to bring questions to light about the artist's traumatic relation with society and spiral into the depths of madness. If Foucault's madness can be seen to be working then *Adaptation* would be a metafilm. The question is: why and for what purpose, if any, does *Adaptation* use the motif of madness as its central theme, effectively disturbing the narrative through the mirroring of its protagonist's unstable grasp of fantasy and reality?

As *Adaptation* progresses Charlie Kaufman becomes more and more depressed and manic because of the impossibility of adapting Orlean's book into a screenplay. His quest for purity, beauty and truth in the form of a simple and pure screenplay has totally consumed him. As Charlie becomes more and more depressed with the impossibility of the task, he starts, it seems, to create the adaptation in his head. Orlean's book becomes a fantasy within Charlie Kaufman's mind and takes characters, facts, and Orlean herself and turns them from non-fiction into fiction. In the process of doing this the film becomes more and more unstable as we realise that what we are seeing is

problematic because it mirrors Charlie's difficulty in recognising fantasy from reality. What we hear and what we see becomes unstable, as we are not sure whether or not it is Charlie's fantasy or his reality. This on one level might be read as having some form of critical intent, as Charlie is experiencing a form of madness.

As mentioned in my chapter, the film ends with the author of the book chasing and trying to kill the author of the screenplay. To create its problematic relationship between fantasy and reality the film creates a problematic dichotomy between critical modernist projections of madness and a playful pastiche of madness. In other words, the film seems to recycle modernist critical forms. It borrows these forms to produce a fragmented medley of references and filmic conventions that exposes the contradictory nature of the postmodern condition; a condition that, like Charlie Kaufman himself, projects a bipolar disposition in its concerns. The film in this way follows the haphazard path of a bipolar trajectory that all at once gathers critical force, using humour and the remnants of modernist forms, but then trails off into nothingness. This seems to leave the

spectator in an unstable position where it is difficult for them to properly connect with Charlie's plight, leaving them unable to walk in his shoes, to feel his pain and angst as a struggling artist.

Compassion and pathos through the film become difficult as we laugh at the absurdness of the film's representations. It seems that the form of madness in *Adaptation* has become a motif for the filmmaker to play with, a simulation, as Baudrillard would say that has lost much of its critical power. Orlean's book *The Orchid Thief*, John Laroche's orchids and Charlie's narcissism and paranoia all seem to be used to push the film off centre, to take us on an entertaining ride in which there is no specific meanings or resolution.

In following, both in content and form, the creative angst of Charlie the struggling artist, the film does potentially set up some form of critical activity, but it seems that the film's avenue of critical enquiry is at odds with itself, taking hold one minute and the next mocking itself. In this way the film itself seems to not know what it wants to project. What is left, it seems, is a film that provokes a certain knowingness and smugness in its

representations, yet does not use this self-consciousness for any purpose. The postmodern audience has already been primed for this type of filmic game, the theme of craziness and lunacy in *Being John Malkovich* and its intertextual use within the film that we are watching is an example of this hyper-awareness. The credits to the film attribute the screenplay to both Charlie and Donald Kaufman. This may again point towards the tongue and cheek nature of the film.

In this way *Adaptation* flirts with madness, but this is all perhaps it aspires to. Its use of madness seems to be all at once a rekindling and then a subversion of a critical modernist avenue of enquiry. *Adaptation* is undoubtedly self-indulgent and self-reflexive as it is about the actual writing process and the real Charlie Kaufman's dilemma in creating the actual film. But I'm not really sure what this all means in a critical sense. The film certainly does not present itself as much of a critique of modern society and the pressures on the artist. All critical distance collapses; the film holds itself aloof from existential enquiry. Its images are made of images that we already recognise; its protagonists exist only



as motifs and caricatures than as real human beings that can feel pain, pity, anger and love. *Adaptation* seems to encapsulate the postmodern condition where the filmmaker and their film seems to have become schizophrenic, using a medley of previous forms and styles that ends up producing an effect that results from the co-existence of disparate and indifferent qualities and identities. In doing this the madness that Foucault speaks of, which echoes modern human detachment, introspection and despair, becomes one more form of entertainment for a mass audience that has become conditioned to the hybridity and contradictory nature of recent cinematic expression.

*The Matrix* also seems to embody the same sort of paradox in its representations that alternate between critical modernist and postmodern forms. The possible concerns of the filmmakers might be mirrored through Neo's problematic grasp of what is real and what is imagined. These concerns might be seen as being a metaphor for what is real and what is imaginary in contemporary society. This theme, like that of *Adaptation's* narrative which mirrors the haphazard path of angst of its struggling artist, might again potentially be read as being metafilmic in its

concerns in which the formal critical modernist qualities of madness: schizophrenia, delirium, and mania, etc are used in the content and the form of the narrative, thus mirroring and revealing to spectators the existential concerns of the filmmakers.

These concerns might be seen through the content of the film, as the narrative does potentially set itself up as a possible critique of the pressures of modern society that can drive the individual mad. As discussed in the previous chapter, in *The Matrix* humanity is trapped in womb-like pods, being fed an illusion of life; they, of course, are being fed a deception. In the theatre or in the comfort of our armchairs we might be seen as being in a similar predicament. This is a comforting, alluring, womb-like environment where we are held captive and fed a concoction of image and sound nutrients that unwittingly sustain our own sense of reality, albeit often a biased and conditioned sense of reality. So, to use an analogy: in the theatre we might be seen as being in a similar situation to the people in pods in *The Matrix*. On a larger scale, in society we are in the same predicament as in the theatre, we are also constantly bombarded by images that seek to pull the

wool over our eyes and to condition us to certain beliefs and ideals. As mentioned in my chapter, computers and the Internet also play a major role in being technologies of domination. Our lives are controlled, regulated and monitored by technologies that seem similar to the unseen presence in *The Matrix*. The question is whether or not *The Matrix* manages to project this form of critical enquiry through its representation of a protagonist who might be seen as finding the distinction between reality and fantasy problematic.

When Neo is first taken to see Morpheus, he tells him: "The Matrix is everywhere...it is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth. Neo asks "what truth?" And Morpheus replies, "That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, born inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste or touch. A prison for your mind". Morpheus holds out his hands; one contains a red pill and the other a blue pill. He tells Neo that if he takes the red pill, the truth will be revealed. If he takes the blue, then he will return to his normal life believing whatever he chooses. This as I have argued might be read as a complete fantasy in Neo's troubled

mind. Morpheus and the world of the Matrix might all be a paranoid delusion that Neo creates as a reaction to an unliveable and unbearable life, a modern society where nothing is real and meaningful anymore. This scene holds the possibility of working as a metaphor for our own real-life situations.

Neo struggles with his delusions. He fights with his demons until he finally gives in and his fantasy becomes fully realised, totally consuming him. This struggle between choosing the illusion or what is real in life may be part of the film's concerns. Cypher, although possibly just one of Neo's fantasies, also embodies this tug between choosing the real world or the illusion. He has been with Morpheus since the beginning, but he has grown tired of the continual struggle, tired of resisting the allure of the illusion. So Cypher conspires with the agents, who promise to erase his memories and plug him back into the Matrix, in return for Morpheus' capture. Cypher's betrayal is dramatised in a scene that takes place inside the Matrix. He sits with agent Smith at a table in a posh restaurant. On Cypher's plate is a juicy steak. Agent Smith says, "Do we have a deal?" Cypher replies, "You know, I know this steak doesn't exist. I

know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realise? Ignorance is bliss..."

Cypher has given into the illusion; he wants to return to its comforts. He longs to return to the illusory comforts of the womb. He was unplugged nine years ago and had regretted taking the red pill ever since. Like Neo and Cypher we are constantly doing battle with the desire to succumb to the illusion of life, to give into its comforts and to remain passive or to step beyond our comfort zone, out of our pods, into the world of non-passivity and awareness of the constructions of "reality" in life.

Both Neo's struggle to accept his predicament in a "mad" world in which he is not sure of what is real and what is imaginary and Cypher's betrayal could be read as a challenge to the spectator and as part of the self-reflexivity of the film. In this way the film might be read as asking us to think about in our own lives is this dilemma. Do we want to sit unmoving in a womb-like environment, eating succulent steak and fooling ourselves that our lives are what we really

think they are, or do we want to step beyond what we think to be real, out into the chaos of life?

But what does an analogy like this actually mean? Does the film in anyway incite us through its protagonist's mental state to think about our own real-life situation? *The Matrix*, on one level can be read as a science fiction film that actually challenges the audience to think and question by making problematic the distinction between what is real and what is imaginary: a category of critical madness. What is better: Life in a happy illusion, or reality at war with machines, living in a barren and desolate world. Is the world we live in just an illusion designed to keep us obedient?

*The Matrix* might be read as successfully reflecting back upon the spectator these ideas, creating unease with our own reality, but perhaps one that follows in a recent line of films, Alex Proyas' *Dark City*(1998), and Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*(1988), to name a couple, that might be seen as uncritically engaging with and recycling these ideas to entertain the fashionable cineaste elite. In fact, filmmakers have been using these well-trodden storylines since Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*(1927). Again,

modern audiences might be seen as having already been primed to this sort filmic fare. In this way most people have become conditioned to the ideas that these films circumnavigate, and that any critical intent that they have may have becomes problematic and is perhaps lessened or non-existent.

*The Matrix* has had an unparalleled response from academics. For a Hollywood film it has at its heart deeply intriguing philosophical questions that have been written about extensively.<sup>3</sup> However it is hard to tell if this was the intention of the filmmakers. The film, perhaps has only been embraced due to its richness of citations and allusions that embody a postmodern sensibility that insists on revealing itself as a system that utilises nostalgia and the mythic fragments of culture.

This melting pot of fragmented references and the questioning of what is real and what is imaginary make the film problematic in its concerns. This gives the film a feeling that is akin to schizophrenia, but not in the critical modernist sense, as it seems that these fragmentary allusions are there for fashionable

effect rather than for some critical intention. Contemporary filmic expression seems to embody the symptoms of schizophrenia, cultural forces that scramble and confuse. But it is hard to tell if this schizophrenic confusion has completely destroyed the possibility of critical perspectives, such as those found in modernist traditions. This perhaps places *The Matrix* in the uncritical postmodern vein, a tendency that brazenly uses critical modernist forms, with uncritical intention.

Both *Adaptation* and *The Matrix*, it seems, lean more towards pastiche than a modernist critical strategy. John Belton argues in regards to the postmodern:

In terms of stylistic practices, postmodern artists rely on *pastiche*- a form of imitation of the unique style or content of earlier works that lack any trace of the satire or parody that characterizes traditional forms of imitation. Pastiche is an entirely *neutral* practice; it conveys no perceptible attitude towards the original. The artist merely adopts a preexistent stylistic mask and speaks

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<sup>3</sup> See *Taking the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and Religion in The Matrix*. Edited by Glenn Yeffeth, introduction by David Gerrold or *The Matrix and Philosophy*, edited by William Irwin.



blankly...in the voice of others. Postmodern works also acknowledge the primary obstacle confronting contemporary artists – the inability to say anything that has not already been said, the inability to create or to express that which is unique or novel.<sup>4</sup>

Belton also notes a sense of critical exhaustion in regards to postmodern cinema, stating, "Unlike classical cinema, which gives a definite order to experience, these works capture the chaotic spirit of the times. As works that did not know what they wanted to say, they simply reflect the cultural conditions that produced them."<sup>5</sup>

A film that may challenge Belton's argument is *Mulholland Dr.* The film comes closer to being put into that special category of literature, paintings and films "that exist in a region where madness challeng[es] the work of art."<sup>6</sup> My analysis of Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* explored how the film uses the non-linear aesthetic of a dream rather than a cause and effect narrative to charter the main character's decent into suicide. In this way Lynch's filmic

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<sup>4</sup> Belton, John. *American Cinema/American Culture*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), p.308

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.309

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 271

strategies challenge the idiosyncrasies of the cinematic belief system forming a basis for a potentially deconstructive form of social criticism that reveals itself through the exposure of its sick and dysfunctional, yet completely human, characters' demise. For this effect, Lynch uses dream-like techniques, both visual and auditory, of Hollywood culture, with their all-encompassing appeal, to work from within the system he wishes to expose. Lynch's work is a film of doubles; everything has another side that mirrors Diane's bipolar disorder. In this way, through the madness of Diane's twisted dream-fantasy, the film highlights the terrible pressures of Hollywood and other societal influences that potentially can drive the individual mad.

In its representations of the tyranny Hollywood with its untoward effects on the psyche of individuals the film strives for a greater reality, one where cinematic forms and cinematic influences are made dark and strange suggesting an outlet from all the world's pain. The first scene with its dancers performing the jitterbug against a vibrant purple screen emphasises this intent. These first scene's generic forms are made unreal; the dancer's reflections are hollow

figures with a hyper-composed flatness. The reflections on the purple backdrop seem to be one dimensional, making the filmic projections look like cardboard cut-outs and of course they are just cardboard cut-outs, they are just filmic representations, images projected onto a screen. From this point on all of Lynch's images turn inwards on themselves, revealing that they are merely film images that only exist in the world of film. This, effectively, challenges the way we relate to screen images; no longer can we be totally passive in our unabated surrender to these filmic tropes. There is something hiding beneath Lynch's painterly images that you can feel, a something that makes the viewer aware of the pain and suffering of all his characters and how this relates to life.

In this way the film unsettles its narrative by making explicitly problematic, through a dream-like narrative structure, the relationship between reality and fantasy, a category of madness. Hayles and Gessler argue that:

In contrast to other films that represent dream sequences after the viewer has been introduced to

normative reality, thus allowing a clear distinction to be made between the real and unreal, *Mulholland Drive* gives only the briefest initial glimpses of quotidian reality in contexts that make understanding them as such almost impossible on a first viewing. Rather, *Mulholland Drive* situates the establishing scenes in a "reality" that is already a dream.<sup>7</sup>

In the subversive and unorthodox use of a dream-like aesthetic the film's intent was widely misinterpreted and criticised because of its refusal to conform to the regularities of illusionistic story telling. In this way I believe that Lynch has been successful in using critical modernist strategies in a tradition that ruptures and exposes forms of ideological cinematic and social influence.

All Lynch's characters are "types" made absurd, this being a way to reveal their status as constructed "filmic myths" and as the mental projections of the unstable Diane. These characters react as if they are perfectly normal through their stylised acting. What makes their appearance surreal is their unnatural placement and relationship with everyday objects.

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<sup>7</sup> Hayles, K & Gessler, N. Home page. 28 January, 2005.  
[www.sscnet.ucla.edu/geog/gessler/cv-pubs/03slipstream.pdf](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/geog/gessler/cv-pubs/03slipstream.pdf)

Salvador Dali's famous *Persistence of Memory* (1931) which pictures a desolate landscape inhabited by limp, melting watches, springs to mind here. In this way Lynch's film depicts ordinary objects in implausible and unexpected dream-like situations that seem to stem from Diane's troubled mind.

Lynch, who studied modernist painting in his early years, is one director that can be seen as using Surrealist tendencies in his films. It is arguable that Lynch succeeds in upholding the fundamental principles of the Surrealist manifesto in *Mulholland Dr.* with the film's sociological absurdism that enlists its power by deconstructing bourgeois ethics and ridiculing social taboos. He uses Surrealist techniques by skilfully documenting his protagonist's demise, by revealing her as a victim of a cruel and influential system that eventually drives her mad.

*Mulholland Dr.* can be seen as documenting the ~~decent~~ descent into madness of its protagonist, Diane to illuminate the false rationalism of bourgeois society. The film achieves this by following the haphazard trajectory of Diane's self-fulfilling fantasy. In this regard Lynch borrows heavily from Surrealism, taking an irrational dreamlike narrative that stems from the

psychotic dreams of the failing and psychotic Diane. Surrealism was heavily influenced by Freud's idea that the "dream" can reveal the truth about people's thoughts and feelings. Jean Goudal argues:

The artists principal target is henceforth to search for a reality in a dream superior to that which is logical, therefore arbitrary, exercise of thought suggest to us. On the one hand Surrealism presents itself as a critique of existing forms of literature, on the other as a complete renewal of the field and of artistic method and even, perhaps, as a revelation of the most general rule of human activity: in short, the absolute overthrow of all values.<sup>8</sup>

After the tradition of the Surrealists, *Mulholland Dr.* has no intention of pleasing or gratifying the spectator; on the contrary, it wishes to show them, through Diane's failing mental state, the sickness that is at the heart of society. In this way the film may potentially come close to using the Foucauldian idea of "madness" as a critical device.

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<sup>8</sup> Hammond, Paul. *The Shadow and its Shadow: Surrealist Writing on the Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), p.3

It is important to note that the founding Surrealists artist were revolting against a society that seemed corrupt to its core, especially after the terror of WW1. What these artists aspired to was a new consciousness that would directly confront the French culture of rationalisation and bureaucratisation of modern institutions. In this regard I think Lynch also strives for the same effect; he sees society as corrupt but capable of change. In fact what Lynch might be suggesting is that an individual's madness is only a reaction to a societal mentality that makes life unliveable for them. Society is in fact mad, not the individual. Lynch, in other words, uses the revolutionary power of his art to question what is real and what is imagined in society, by harnessing dream states and unleashing unconscious desire. It is this spirit of revolt and transcendence that is of utmost importance in reading Lynch as an artist whose concerns lie with the societal influences that affect and drive "mad" the individual.

But it is still not so simple to label Lynch as a metafilmic artist as it seems that to some small or large degree all "contemporary cinema perpetuates modernist impulses...punctuated with periodic postmodern

breaks with the past"<sup>9</sup> This makes any absolute reading of any film using Foucault's theory of madness problematic. *Adaptation*, *Mulholland Dr.* and *The Matrix* cannot totally escape this sensibility. *Adaptation* appears to be more of a postmodern romp that reuses the constructs of "madness", as a pastiche, solely for fun and entertainment. In doing this its critical intent becomes problematic. *The Matrix* follows a similar trajectory. *Mulholland Dr.* appears to use madness more effectively, using a strategy that is closer to Foucault's idea of madness. The film's narrative is driven and constantly interrupted by Diane's pathologies. In this way the film follows the metafictional path of constantly keeping us aware of the *unlikeliness* of life to cinema and secondly by reminding us of the *uncanny* likeness that the constructed medium of film may present to our lives and worldview. Strangely enough *Mulholland Dr.* keeps us awake from dreaming by using the power of the dream to disrupt narrative time and meaning.

In my chosen films madness has appeared in different ways. I have explored the possibility of

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<sup>9</sup> Denzin, Norman, K. *Images of Postmodern Society*, (London: Sage Publications. 1991), p.155



madness and film working together to produce an aesthetic that holds the possibility of being able to metaphorically ask questions about society, one that possibly carries on the metafilmic modernist tradition of works of art that work against and outside the dominant order of bourgeois values and ideals.

My concern in this thesis has not been to find an absolute answer but to undertake an analysis, an exploration of how film might potentially utilise the disruptive tendencies of madness. This thesis has analysed how the Foucauldian idea of "madness" might work from the inside of recent films to interrupt the illusory influences of orthodox cinema to produce the kind of film that is not consumed, as conventional films are, but which stimulates an active audience response.

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